

LAUGHING EYE.

The Heroine of the Forest.

BY JEAN SOUTHARD.

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LAUGHING EYE.

CHAPTER I.

"Ugh! me find! Me soon bring pale face squaw back to her friends."

"Wal, White Panther, in coorse yer will ef yer says yer will, but I swear the trail looks consederably bumfoozled just at this yer place. Thare's tracks leadin' to the river, and thare's tracks straight ahead. So what in the devil be yer goin' ter do?"

"Ugh! You follow Injun. See, pale face, tracks go to river an' tracks go right on, that be to blind us. You come on! see, when wade little ways, den tracks meet tracks that straight from here."

"Yes, but how do ye know but what the varmints crossed over to the other side?"

"No can go dis time of year, current bes ter strong in river, drift dem way down good many long mile."

"Drive on, Indian, I allers gives in to you, an' I aint agoin' to set up agin yer now, but old Jed Pollard won't give in to no white man as travels these parts. No, sir! I say, Indian, its my belief that that yer pesky sneak Sim Morton is at the bottom of Miss Leonora's disappearance; but, Lord, it ud never do ter say so up ter the big house, for they thinks there's no one like him, specially the old Judge."

"Ugh, white man no cunning nuff; it be Injuns that have got young white squaw."

"That may be, long legs, but I tell you Squire Morton is at the bottom of it all. Gol durn the red devils; there never was but one human one made, White Panther, an' I reckon yer know who that one ar. Darned ef I don't think there's a good deal of human natur about you."

"Ole Jed, too much talk; shut mouth, and follow Injun; when white brave talk in forest, trees they hear sometime."

Our story opens about thirty years ago in the western wilds of Minnesota. A number of the settlers having become excited and frightened at hearing the report of an attack threatened by hostile Indians, had taken refuge in the block house—a big house owned and occupied by Judge Houghton and his family—which consisted of his sister, Miss Florence Houghton, his son, Lionel, aged twenty-one years; his two daughters, Leonora and Lois, aged respectively twenty-two and eighteen, and orphaned nephew, James Carleton, about twenty-five years of age, and the affianced husband of Lois.

Among those who had come to the block house was one 'Squire Morton, a wealthy man of middle age. He was tall and angular, with a hatchet shaped face, black snakey eyes, heavy black brows that met on his nose, thick, bristly iron gray hair which always stood on end, and in fact the 'squire was a most repulsive man, and had he been poor and a stranger, would have been distrusted by all within the block house.

He had asked for the hand of Leonora of her father, and had been told by him that if his daughter accepted his offer, he, her father, would be the last to offer any objections. But Leonora herself had been the one to refuse, and had frankly told the 'Squire that her heart was in another's keeping.

When the 'Squire in an angry manner accused her of loving Arthur Colby (a young man who had come from the East about five years previous), she had frankly admitted the truth of his assertion.

For reasons of his own the 'Squire did not wish any one to learn of his defeat, and had asked Leonora not to speak of it to any one, which promise was readily given.

Early in the morning on the day before the opening of our story, on going to the room occupied by the two daughters of the Judge, the young negress, Hetty, whose duty it was to call the young ladies and assist them with their toilet, found Lois sleeping soundly, but Leonora was missing.

On questioning Lois, they learned from the frightened girl that she and Leonora had retired as usual on the previous night, and she had slept soundly until awakened by her little servant, and informed of her sister's disappearance.

That any one could have entered the block house and passed out again with one of the inmates seemed utterly impossible to every one, as there had been guards posted all around the en-

closure; but on examination it was found that there were the prints of moccasined feet leading around to the rear of the block house and from there out to the forest, where they were lost or mingled with the prints of many more?

Squire Morton had acted as guard that night at the rear entrance, and when he heard that Miss Leonora had been carried away by Indians he seemed greatly agitated, and was at a loss to account for her being taken off almost before his very eyes as it appeared she had been.

He had expressed an opinion to the Judge that it would be best to wait and see if a ransom was not asked for her restoration, offering, in case it was to pay it himself.

Lionel Houghton and Arthur Colby were nearly wild, and rushed with others to start at once on the trail of Leonora's abductors. But the Judge, on finding how determined they were, and influenced by the Squire, forbade them or any one else to leave the block house unless they for all time withdrew from his protection.

About four o'clock in the afternoon there was a knock at the gate of the enclosure, and the guard admitted the old trapper, Jedediah Pollard and the Indian, White Panther, whom we introduced to the reader at the opening of our story.

On finding them all in trouble and learning the particulars, the trapper requested to see the tracks at once. He was led to them by Lionel, Arthur and James Colby. Old Jed asked who acted as guard at that particular place, and on being told, he rolled up his eyes and gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

The Indian, who had not spoken, but had been carefully studying the ground, then said—

"Dis bees no Injun; dis bees white man."

"Why," said Arthur, "they are moccasin tracks."

"Um! dey be moccasin tracks, but white man he wear," said White Panther.

"Injun," said Jed, "I guess yer right; them looks mighty sight like the feet of some white skunk. By jingo, youngster," addressing Lionel, "who have you sent out to follow them up?"

"No one," replied Lionel. "We wished to raise a party and start out, but father, at the suggestion of Squire Morton, forbade our going, for the Squire thinks that my sister can be ransomed."

"The devil! Now see here, the Squire is at the bottom of this as sure as you are born, for what white man would want

to tug off Miss Leny unless it was the Squire, who is, as any fool would know, clean smit with her, an' she hates him the Lord knows, an' likes some one else the Squire knows."

"But why," asked Arthur, "are you so sure it was not an Indian who effected an entrance and carried her away?"

"See here, boy, it's my opinion the red devils is all workin' for the Squire, bekase ef they wan't, and a redskin could get in here, why in thunder didn't he open the gate and let the whole posse of 'em in, and have a fust rate massacre out on it? That would suit them to a pin-head."

Lionel, Arthur and James, after consulting together, advanced close to old Jed and White Panther, and Arthur said:

"Jed, we are going to allow you to know, for we have never as yet found you to be otherwise than correct in any opinion you expressed. We none of us bear the Squire any love, and think he will bear watching. We have decided to set some trusty person to watch the Squire, while we, with your sanction, go in pursuit of those who have taken Leonora away."

"Wal, youngster, yer can watch the Squire as much as yer please, but ye had better do it yourselves, and not leave the block house; then the Squire'll think he's havin' things all his own way."

"But are we to make no effort to rescue my sister from these inhuman fiends?" asked Lionel.

"Keep cool, hoy; keep cool. Me an' White Panther is goin' on the trail, an' two's better'n half a dozen; but we'll tell the Jedge we're goin' towards the North ter set some traps. Hate ter lie ter the Jedge, boy, but yer see it's the only way, kase the cussed Squire's completely bumfoozied him."

"Jed," said Arthur, "we are impatient to go in search of our loved Leonora, and we would like to be the ones to liberate her from the hands of those demons and give them the punishment they so richly deserve; but we yield to your superior judgment, and feel that you know best, and if you are ever in need of friends you will know where to find three, at least, who will serve you and the Indian with their lives."

"Um! White men too much talk; bime by be all dark, an' white squaw be in enemy's camp, way off in forest," said White Panther.

"True," said Lionel. "But do you intend starting at once?"

"Yes," said Jed. "We've got about three hours of daylight, an' we'd better go."

"Then come to the house and get some food before starting," said Lionel

"Wal, I reckon a bite wouldn't go bad; eh, Indian?"

"Um! Ole Jed all time eat. Make lazy. Ugh!"

Lionel led the way to the house, the rest following, where they found the Judge waiting to speak with Jed.

"Well, Jed," said the Judge, "what is your opinion in regard to my daughter's disappearance? What do you think it best to do?"

"Wal, Judge, I hardly know. Things look pretty well blum-mixicated. The Injuns has got so cussed ugly that if yer tries to git the girl without offering a ransom it might be bad for her. It'll be well enough ter wait er spell an' see, an' perhaps by the time long legs an' me gets back this yer way it'll be time ter decide what ter do."

"I think you are right, Jed," replied the Judge, "but we were congratulating ourselves on having your assistance here, as we are expecting an attack from the Indians at any moment."

"Wal, Judge, I don't think but what you'll master 'em any way, an' me an' White Panther 'll be back 'fore long; an' maybe while we're gone we shall hear something about what they expect to do."

Let us now go to the kitchen and take notice of what is transpiring there. The servants of the Judge were all colored people, who were useful in their own way, but who, in case of any trouble with the Indians, would be of little or no assistance. In the centre of the kitchen, the observed of all the rest, stands a queer-looking negro, or, as he prefers being called, a colored gentleman, who is known as Pete Hayter. Listen for a while to the statements of the young man.

"De d— redskin am ob no account, gemmen. De fac am de white people don know how ter take um. Now, if de Judge would put dis man in full power he'd make 'em smart. Now I holds, gemmen, dat de only way to stop all fuss jes whar it am can be did by jes marchin' out boldly wid our guns an' 'munition an goin' straight to dem redskins and killin' 'em right off, 'cept some ob de ole ones we wud bring back wid us an' put 'em right in de kitchen an' make 'em serb us ob de cullered persuasion. De red man am made to serb de cullered man, kase why? Kase he am not so good as de nigger; he am got no brains an' he am got no larning; he am no sojer, instead

ob being brave an' goin' right out afore de enemy dey hides behind de trees an' steals folks out ob houses."

"But I say, you Pete," exclaimed another, "s'posin' yer walked right out boldly an' de Injins walks right out boldly an' yer bofe walks right out boldly, how yer know, yer nigger, whether yer agoin to git shot and killed or whether de enemy am goin' ter git shot an' killed."

"Mister Jones, dat am de risk dat all us brave sojers runs mo' or less. If dar war no danger den any coward could be a sojer, but we brave ones allers kills de enemy bekase we is so brave."

"I tink, for my part, Mister Hayter am right," said a young colored lady. "He am in my opinion a bery brave young man, an' I 'clares to yer all dat I here an' now places myself under de special protection ob dat young man."

"I is pleased to accep' de charge, Miss Miller, an' hopes I may prove worthy of protectin' ye all tro dis yer yearthly journey. But, speakin' ob de red man, he am a dam coward, an' dis nigger'll tell 'em so some day. Where's de redskin as can scare me? Oh, golly! how I longs to get at one. Oh, lordy massy, jes' show him to me while I cut him!"

Just at this moment Pete turned his eye toward the door.

"Oh, lordy! Mr. Red Skin, I didn't mean it! Don't burn me to de stake! Massy, oh, shoot me on de spot, but don't torter de poor nigger."

Pete rolled upon the floor in agony, his eyes still riveted on the door. The rest of the negroes followed his glance, and there in the doorway stood the tall form of an Indian, who sternly regarded Pete.

As soon as they beheld him they were in nearly as bad a condition as Pete, and at once began begging for their lives and making promises of all kinds if they might only be spared. But the Indian never took his eyes off from poor Pete, and after regarding him some time he slowly stalked up to where he lay and said:

"Black man, he fool!"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Big Chief, I know I is a fool."

"Injun he take scalp."

"Oh, good Mr. Injun, you may hab all my har, but for de lub ob heben, don' kill me."

"Too much talk. Injun he kill."

"Oh, Mr. Big Risin' Moon Settin' Sun Wild Horse Big Bear, don' kill me an' I'll go wid yer any whar yer says." And Pete

pleadingly clasped his hands, his limbs shaking and his teeth chattering. How much longer this would have lasted is impossible to tell, but at that moment a roar of laughter was heard, and there around the door stood Judge Houghton and Lionel, Arthur, James and Jed, all laughing till the tears rolled down their cheeks.

CHAPTER II.

Pete then saw that he had been fooled, and very much ashamed of himself, slunk out of sight. When, some hours after, his colored friends hinted that Pete was not so brave as he would have people believe, he merely excused himself by saying—

“I know’d who it was all de time—only wanted to skeer yer. Know’d yer was all a set ob cowards.”

Jed and White Panther decided to lose no more time, as it was now nearly sunset, and they would have little light left to help them on their way.

Bidding the Judge and the rest farewell, and promising to return at once if they should learn anything concerning an attack on the block house, they started off, and were soon lost to view in the forest.

Having reached the river and discovered the division of the party of Indians they were pursuing, they decided it was best to camp as soon as they could find a suitable place, it being too dark to go on their way.

They soon found a suitable place, and ere long were rolled in their blankets and sleeping. They had not been sleeping long when the Indian suddenly rose and touched Jed on the shoulder. Jed immediately arose, and seeing the Indian climbing a tree, he followed suit, and was soon comfortably ensconced in a neighboring tree.

They were none too soon, for there immediately burst upon their view three men.

They halted almost beneath the old trapper’s tree.

“I say, Bill,” said one, “this is a devilish ticklish job, and I don’t just like it. I don’t care much where a man is concerned, but d— me if I like stealin’ women.”

“Oh, bother, Jack, don’t squirm out of it like a woman, now that you’ve begun. It’ll be a darned sight better for the girl to

get away from the Indians, and she'll be glad enough to do so, I've no doubt."

"But I don't understand why the Squire should want to get the girl away from the Indians after hiring them to carry her off."

"Why, you see, Jack, the Squire wants to make her marry him, and offered Big Owl a certain sum of money to lug her off, but that renegade, Black Patch, has laid a plan with Big Owl to keep the girl and try and get a larger ransom from her people."

"Well, I'm dashed if I don't think she's a blamed sight better off where she is than she will be with the Squire, unless she will marry him and hold her tongue."

"That's nothing to us," answered the third, recognized by Jed as a liar, horse-thief and general ruffian, and called Fat Jake. "We want the swag, and I guess you want it just as bad as we do."

"That I do, and of course I shan't back out, now that I've begun; but I wish it was a man," answered Jack.

"Well, we may as well finish out the night right here and start at day light," said Bill.

The men then lay down on the ground as Jed and White Panther had done a short time before, while Jed and the Indian were obliged to stick to their trees and dare not close their eyes in sleep for fear of falling out.

Morning at last dawned, and the three men after partaking of a small quantity of food, started off, the trapper and Indian following, after eating food sufficient to sustain them on their journey.

After a few hours tramp the three men separated. They decided that two should go after the girl and one to an old shanty and wait the coming of the other two.

Fat Jake and Bill were to set off at once after the Indians, and our friends, White Panther and Old Jed, followed as close as possible without allowing themselves to be discovered, leaving Jack to go along to the old hut.

"I say, Bill," said Fat Jake, "how do you propose to go to work about this biz?"

"Wall, we can go straight into camp, being on the right kind of terms with the Indians, and say we want to camp there for the night. Of course old Big Owl will allow us to stretch out when and where we please, which will be when we have found

out the exact tent in which the gal is confined, and at the farthest possible distance from the fire. Then when they are all asleep we can get up, and while I go for the girl you can quietly rap the nearest sentinel on the head."

"But—?"

"Well?"

"If the woman screams?"

"D— her, she can't?"

"What will you do to prevent it?"

"Throw my blanket over her head."

"Very well, let us go into camp as soon as we can, that we may have as much time as possible to get the lay of the land."

"I say, Jake?"

"Well?"

"I've got a plan."

"For what?"

"To make money."

"How?"

"By keeping the girl ourselves and selling her to the highest bidder! What do you say to that?"

"A thunderin' good plan; we will propose it to Jack when we meet him at the shanty."

"Why say anything to him? Why meet him at all? The fewer there are in this game the more money falls to each man."

"Yes, but he would put the Squire on our track."

"Well, if the Squire can't find her?"

"He would have the whole block house on our track."

"He would never dare. I can do him too much harm."

"Well, if you are sure all is right in that direction, the plan suits me. But what will you do with her?"

"Take her to my coop."

"But the old woman?"

"Oh, Judy's all right."

"She can't escape?"

"Not if I put her in my little parlor down in the cellar."

"But the Indians may find us out."

"Not if we do our part as well as we expect; but you ask too many questions, Jake, and put too many bears in the way. Now of course if you are afraid to earn a thousand dollars instead of two hundred, why of course the only thing to do is to

take the smaller sum and say nothing more. It would never do to shatter your nervous system."

"Who in — is afraid? I am afraid of nothing. I only want to know that I stand one chance out of ten of not getting found out, that's all."

"You agree then?"

"Yes."

"Very well; here we are in camp."

They now entered the Indian encampment and gravely nodded to a number of Indians, who as gravely returned the salutation.

Among this band of Indians was a white renegade named Black Patch, on account of a black patch or mark on his left cheek which partly covered his eye. An uglier looking being could not be found in human shape. He had the red skin, high cheek bones and snakey eyes of the Indians, while his teeth resembled the fangs of a dog. The patch over his eye, together with an ugly red scar reaching from his right ear across his chin, gave him the appearance of a very demon.

This frightful looking being now sauntered up to the two ruffians and extended his hand to each in turn, and then said:

"What brings my white brother to the camp of Black Patch?"

"We came to see Big Owl, and ask permission to camp with our red brothers to-night."

"My chief, Big Owl, will be glad to meet my brothers and will welcome them to his wigwam. If my brothers will come with me, I will conduct them to Big Owl."

The two white men followed the renegade, who at once led them to a tall, fine-looking young Indian, who, as any one could tell from his dress, was chief of the tribe.

"Big Owl, I have brought my white brothers, Bill and Fat Jake."

"Big Owl welcomes them, and asks how he can serve the palefaces?"

"We ask Big Owl's permission to be allowed to camp here for the night."

"My white friends are welcome to camp with Big Owl as long and as often as they please. But what news do my white friends bring?"

"The settlers are in arms at the big house and expect an at-

tack from the red men. Why has not Big Owl yet slain the whites?"

"Big Owl will wait until they are off their guard, and then he will kill."

Our friends, Jed and White Panther, after hearing the conversation between the three ruffians, failed to hear what passed between Bill and Fat Jake after they left Jack, and therefore supposed that it was agreed upon that Leonora would be placed at the disposal of Squire Morton. So they decided that it would be easier to rescue her from the Indians than from the Squire; so when the ruffians were trying to make off with her, White Panther was to give an alarm, then if possible in the confusion seize Leonora and fly to some place of safety.

That night Leonora, being very much fatigued, fell into a profound slumber, in spite of all her efforts to keep her eyes open. Suddenly she was awakened by a stifling sensation, and found she was being rapidly borne away in some one's arms, her head closely enveloped in some large, heavy garment.

When Bill and Fat Jake had gone a little distance from the camp, White Panther gave a yell that alarmed the slumbering Indians.

"Hurry on, Jake," said Bill, "the devils have missed us and we have no time to lose. Unless we can get far enough away to uncover the girl and prevent her screams from being heard, she will stifle to death."

White Panther and Jed suddenly confronted them, and thinking the Indians were surrounding them they dropped Leonora and ran as fast as their legs would carry them.

White Panther quickly lifted Leonora from the ground, and followed by the trapper rushed for the river.

They took no pains to conceal their tracks, for they well knew the moon would not shine sufficiently bright through the forest to enable their pursuers to follow their trail, and they would have to wait until daylight came to their aid.

Arrived at the river Jed dashed some of the cold water in Leonora's face and she soon revived. She looked slowly around as if trying to find out where she was. When her memory came to her aid she started up in alarm, but Jed reassured her and told her she was among friends. She then recognized Jed and White Panther, whom she had often seen at her father's house.

"Oh, Mr. Pollard, tell me, in the name of heaven, how I came

to be here with you and White Panther instead of among enemies?"

Jed told her how he had rescued her.

"Then it was not you who took me from the tent?"

"No, Miss Leny; it war that pesky devil, Bill Higgins," said Jed.

"But what was he going to do with me?"

"Deliver you to Squire Morton."

"Squire Morton!"

"Yaas."

"And for what?"

Jed then told her of the conversation which he had overheard in the woods.

Leonora was shocked, and determined to tell her father of the Squire's perfidy as soon as she should reach home.

The Indian, who had gone a short distance down the stream, now returned in a canoe which he had found near the enemy's camp. Jed, after helping Leonora into the boat, followed, and they rowed up the stream until daylight, when they went ashore, and the Indian and Jed managed to make their way slowly along with the boat, Leonora following behind.

At length they halted, intending to wait until it was night and then resume their journey in the boat. The Indian went in search of game that he might bring down with an arrow, leaving the trapper and Leonora alone. Jed was leaning back against a tree busily talking to Leonora, when suddenly a cloth was drawn tightly across their mouths and their arms were pinioned behind them.

The Indians had stealthily followed them, and amongst their number Jed recognized Black Patch, who walked up to him as he lay upon the ground and said:

"What white man goin' to do with squaw?"

"Wal, you white nigger, that's for you to find out, I reckon."

"White man answer Black Patch, may be he let go."

"Show. May be white man'll go anyhow."

"You very brave. Me tink bime by you change your tune."

"White Indian, I don't sing."

"Give you gun to Injun."

"No. I'm bust if I will. Take it if you want it."

"May be guess white man have good many friends all round."

"Wall, may be he has; what of it?"

"Den dey come 'un take brave away an' kill Black Patch."

"See here, yer varmint, ef yer tryin' to find out ef there's a crowd out with me, I'll save ye all the trouble by tellin' ye there ain't no one here but me an' Miss Leny."

"Pale face think he get away from Injun?"

"In course."

"What give Injun if he let you go?"

"A bullet the first time I get a good chance."

"Den Injun guess he keep you."

They then started off with their prisoners towards the camp.

When White Panther went after the canoe he was seen by an Indian, who immediately informed his chief. A party headed by Black Patch at once started on the trail of the fugitives, going along the river bank and keeping the canoe in sight. They had seen and recognized White Panther, and had searched for him in vain before attacking Jed, wishing to learn of his whereabouts, also if there were any more of the trapper's friends about. Black Patch had questioned Jed, and failing to learn anything, left two Indians to watch the place and wait for White Panther's return.

After waiting an hour or more and seeing no signs of any human being, they started off toward the camp, thinking White Panther had fled.

A few moments after they left the Panther appeared, slowly creeping from a hollow log close by, looking cautiously around.

He then examined the ground, and after settling in his own mind the number of the enemy, started off in pursuit of them.

He soon overtook them, and was surprised to see all but three go towards the camp, the three excepted taking the senseless form of Leonora and going in an opposite direction. Without any hesitation he followed the last named.

There were also two more on the track of Leonora, and these were no others than Bill and Fat Jake. They had followed behind the Indians, and as Leonora had really been stolen by some one else, they knew that they would not be suspected by them, and therefore had nothing to fear.

When they saw her placed in charge of only three they were determined to obtain possession of her if possible. They had not noticed the absence of Panther, and the thought that any

one else was playing their own game was the farthest from their minds.

The Indians bore the unconscious Leonora to an old hut occupied by an old Indian hag, a fortune teller, and tool for any one who would pay her gold. This vile wretch, whose name was Quitewah, was a very repulsive and ugly looking being and when she found some one approaching her hut, she stood in the doorway shading her eyes. She at once recognized them as tools of Black Patch, and as she led the way to the interior of her house she said:

“Black Patch has sent you to Quitewah?”

One of the Indians nodded. They then placed Leonora on a bed of straw covered with a buffalo skin, and a bear skin for a pillow. Then the Indian who had by a nod of his head replied to the old woman's question, said:

“Black Patch sent squaw,” pointing to Leonora, “and wants mother Quitewah to keep her and let no one know, and to-morrow as the sun sets he will come to Quitewah and give her gold.”

“Black Patch may trust me if he keeps his promise and brings the gold.”

After talking a few moments longer the Indians left the hut and the old woman went to the couch where Leonora lay, still unconscious, and after pouring a few drops of some liquor down her throat, and dashing some water into her face was rewarded by seeing her eyes slowly open.

Leonora did not speak for some time, but lay looking around the room, and trying to collect her thoughts.

On finding herself alone with a woman she began to question her, but learned nothing except that she was a prisoner, and would not be allowed to leave the hut.

It was now nearly dark, and as the sense of her utter loneliness came over her, her overwrought nerves gave way, and she wept bitterly for some time. Weary and sick she at last fell into a slumber, but was tortured with dreams. When she awoke it was evening, but the only light in the hut was the light of the moon, which came in at the doorway, over which skins were hung, but which were at present drawn back to admit the cool evening breeze.

The old woman was sitting in the doorway smoking and muttering to herself, seeming to take no heed of her companion, who thought that now might be a good time to make her escape,

and at once began looking around to find some way of effecting the desired object. But, allowing she succeeded, what could she do? where should she go? By a strong effort of will she kept back the tears that again rushed to her eyes, and, when the old woman slowly aroused and entered the hut she feigned sleep in order to give herself time to think.

At last she determined to plead with the old woman, and accordingly addressed her.

"Why do you wish to keep me here,—I have never harmed you?"

"Quitewah will not harm pale face."

"But you are keeping me here against my will?"

"Why the pale face want to leave Quitewah?"

"I wish to return to my friends, who are sorrowing for me, and who do not know where I am."

"But I have promised that I will keep the pale face for those who want her more than her friends."

"For the Indians?"

"Yes."

"And I will die by my own hand before I will return to them."

Leonora now thought of one more way to effect her release, and, horrible as the thought of it was to her, she resolved that rather than return to the Indians she would kill the old woman, if necessary, to secure her freedom.

CHAPTER III.

Let us now return to the block house. On the morning after the departure of our friends, Jed and White Panther, Squire Morton said to the Judge—

“It is useless, I cannot sit quietly here and know nothing of the fate of Leonora, but live only in agony of suspense. With your permission Judge, I will go out into the woods and see if I can find any of the red devils, or learn anything in regard to the whereabouts of your daughter. It may be, having dealt with the Indians in various ways, and being well known to them, I may arrange with them to release her.”

“Squire Morton, I can never sufficiently thank you for the interest you manifest in the welfare of my dear daughter, of whom these miserable fiends have robbed me. Still I cannot ask you to endanger your own life to save my child.”

“Nor need you ask me to do so, Judge; it is because I love your daughter, and hope one day to make her my wife, that I wish to try and place her once more with those who love her so tenderly.”

The Judge grasped the Squire's hand and with tears in his eyes thanked him. The Squire, after a few moments' conversation, requested the Judge not to say anything to anyone of his departure, for a few hours at least, and then he left the block house and entered the forest.

Lois Houghton shared her sister's dislike for Squire Morton, and upon learning from her betrothed, James Carleton, of the suspicions that he, her brother Arthur and Jed entertained of his being in some way connected with Leonora's disappearance, she resolved to watch him as closely as possible; she succeeded in concealing her great dislike for him, and had, without exciting suspicion, dogged his footsteps ever since. On hearing him declare to her father his intention of seeking her sister, she hastened to tell Lionel, James and Arthur, whom she found conversing together. After they had heard her, they

looked at each other for a moment in silence; then Lionel said:

"Did you say he had gone, Lois?"

"Yes."

"How long since?"

"Not ten minutes."

Arthur then said: "Lionel, you of course do not wish to disobey your father, nor should I like to if I had one; and you, James, have Lois to watch over and protect. The block-house may be attacked by the Indians at any moment, and no man can be spared. All will be needed to protect it and their friends. I have no father, mother or sister to protect, and only one dear one, who is already in the hands of enemies, worse, perhaps, than those who surround you, and if any harm should befall her I should no longer care to live. I shall at once start out in search of her, and I only ask that you will feign ignorance in regard to my absence, and answer no questions that any one may ask you about me."

"Arthur," said Lionel, as he grasped the young man's hand, "do you think that I will remain and let you go alone? No. There are enough to defend the block house, whose enemies are much less formidable than those of my sister. If we are in danger, walled in securely with men to defend us, and men on guard at every point to scent the first sign of danger that may threaten us, how much greater the peril of poor Leonora, who is in the power of that devil, Sim Morton! No, I shall go with you, and with you share the danger."

"And I will go also, if I may be permitted," said James. "Dearly as I love Lois, I feel it my duty to go, and I know my noble girl will offer no objection. What say you, Lois?"

"I can only say go, James, and forsake not your duty for me, darling. I will be brave and will try not to worry about you. In the end all will be well, and surely dear Leonora will be rescued and brought safely back to us, when she has enlisted in her behalf three of the noblest, truest and bravest men the world contains."

After taking leave of Lois, the three young men left the block house and started on the trail of Squire Morton, and without any difficulty, for he evidently had taken no pains to conceal it, the danger of being followed probably not being sufficiently great to require that amount of trouble.

Let us now pay a visit to Jack, who, in a little shanty in the

depth of the forest, was to await the coming of the two men, Bill and Fat Jake, with Leonora. They were to be there that same night, and the Squire was to be there the next day to give them the promised reward and take Leonora away. The Squire at last arrived, and found Jack in a state of the greatest excitement.

"Where is the young lady?" asked the Squire.

"Don't know," replied Jack.

"Where are Bill and Jake?"

"Devi.'s got 'em, I guess."

"What do you mean by answering me in that manner? Please to be a little more definite in your replies. When did you see them last?"

"Last night, when they left me and started for the girl."

"Good God! And they have not been here?"

"No."

"Fools! if the Indians have caught them at their game they will let out on me. We must look after this. Come, let us go from here and try and find out what is the fate of those idiots."

Then the Squire started off, followed by Jack.

The three young men followed the Squire, and when he entered the hut they hid behind it, and were trying to hear the conversation, when suddenly Lionel looked up and with difficulty suppressed a cry of surprise, for there before them stood White Panther, his arms folded and his eyes riveted upon them.

He motioned them to make no noise, and when Squire Morton and Jack left the hut White Panther entered it and beckoned to the others to follow him. When they had all entered Lionel said:

"In the name of all that is wonderful, where did you come from, White Panther?"

"Come from trail of little white squaw."

"But where is Jed?" asked Arthur.

"Big Owl got him."

"Big Owl captured him?"

"Yes."

"We must go and set Jed free at once," said James, "without him we cannot do much."

"But what of the little white squaw?" asked Lionel. "Is she with Jed a prisoner?"

"No."

"Where then is she?"

"White brave got her."

"Squire Morton?"

"No, two others."

We will leave White Panther to tell his adventures to our three friends, while we return to Leonora and the old woman Quitewah. The old woman, after preparing some food, which she offered to Leonora, who gladly partook of it, again sat down in the doorway and smoked her pipe. Leonora, after finishing her meal of venison and corn bread, quietly got up from her couch and crept stealthily toward the door. Seizing a stool which stood near the door she quickly struck the old hag on the back or the head, who fell insensible to the floor. She was about to rush out when she was stopped by two men, one of whom seized her by the waist and said:

"Much obliged to yer, young woman, you've saved us the trouble."

"What do you mean, sir, by holding me? Let go of my arm and let me go, or I will call for assistance!"

"You will, eh! haw! haw! That's too good. Why, who could hear you? We are miles from any settlement. You would only bring the Indians down upon us full force."

"Then Indians it shall be," and Leonora gave a long, piercing scream.

"D— you, shut up!" said Bill. placing his hand over her mouth.

"You'll have to tie her mouth up," said Jake, "or she'll have Big Owl down on us and all his tribe."

"Then it's not to the Indians you wish to take me?" said Leonora in surprise.

"Wall, I should say not."

"Who then could wish to make me a prisoner?"

"Wall, different ones; at first we agreed to do the job for a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?"

"Yes."

"What friend?"

"Squire Morton!"

"Squire Morton?"

"Yes, that's what I said."

"Are you then going to take me to him?"

"No; we've decided to change the bill of fare, and keep you far a while ourselves."

"And where are you going to take me?"

"To my private residence."

"Where may that be?"

"You'll find out when you get there, so come along; we've wasted too much time already. If you will go quietly we will not harm you, but if you go to squeal again we'll have to gag you."

Leonora thought it best to quietly submit, and did not attempt again to cry out. She tried to question Bill still further but it was useless; he utterly refused to answer any more questions.

After a long and weary march they arrived at a very comfortable looking cabin containing two rooms on the ground or lower floor, and a loft of two rooms. This they entered, and Bill said to a woman about fifty years of age—

"Here, Judy, this is Fat Jake and this is a gal I've fetched for yer ter take particular care of."

Judy dropped a courtesy to each, and said—

"Is the gal to go and come as she pleases?"

"Thunderation! No."

"Where shall I put her?"

"Where you kept the last one."

"Come with me, miss," said Judy, not unkindly.

Leonora followed the woman without a word, who, after lighting a pine torch, opened a trap door, which disclosed a flight of stairs. They descended, and the old woman, after pointing out a pitcher of water, left her, but Judy soon returned with some food, which she placed on a rough wooden table before Leonora, and again left her alone, closing the trap down, which she had neglected to do before.

Leonora gladly ate of the food, and after a prayer to heaven to liberate her and keep her from harm, she threw herself onto a couch of skins and was soon fast asleep, for it was nearly morning, and she was very tired.

After White Panther had finished telling his adventures, Arthur said—

"What are we to do now? Shall we go at once to the place where Leonora is confined?"

"Injun he tell you what you best do. You come with Injun

and help him get ole pale-face Jed, den he help you get young squaw back again."

"The Indian is right," said Lionel. "Without Jed or some one to guide us and tell us what to do, we can accomplish nothing."

They all started off in the direction the Squire and Jack had taken. Let us follow them for a while. He and Jack had not proceeded far when they came across Bill and Jake. They explained the capture of Leonora and the manner in which she had been taken from them by White Panther and Jed. Also the recapture of Leonora by the Indians, together with Jed.

"Curse that Jed Pollard for a meddlesome fool!" said the Squire. "He will meet with the fate he so richly deserves. You say the Indians know nothing of your part in the matter?"

"Yes."

"Then Jack and I will go to Big Owl and pay the price he asks, and take the girl away at once. Go you to the hut again and await our coming."

Big Owl had decided to give Leonora over to the Squire at once, after receiving from him the promised sum, and would not now listen to Black Patch's plan of keeping her until a greater reward was offered, as he wished to break up the camp as soon as possible and make an attack upon the block house.

Upon entering the camp the Squire and Jack at once sought out Big Owl, and the former said:

"I have just now met my two brothers who camped with the Big Owl the night before last. They say the pale maiden was stolen from the Indians in whose hands I placed her for safe keeping."

"The white brother is right."

"But they tell me you have again taken her and a white brave who stole her from you."

"The white brother is right again."

"Then take me to her at once; I wish to speak with her."

"That the Big Owl cannot do."

"Why? Have you then allowed her to again be taken from under your very eyes?"

"My white brother is too hasty. I have caused the white maiden to be taken to the hut of Quitewah, who will keep her safely for my white brother."

"Then I will go at once to Quitewah."

"No; the white brave must wait until Black Patch comes from a hunt. Then he will go with you."

"You can at least take me to your prisoner."

"Yes."

The Squire was conducted to the presence of Jed, whom he found standing bound to a tree, in which tiresome position he had been obliged to remain, until it is doubtful if he could have stood alone, had he been set at liberty.

"So, Sir Meddlesome, you have been trying to steal other people's prisoners?" said Squire Morton.

"Yaas," calmly responded Jed.

"And how do you like it, may I ask?"

"Yaas, you may ask."

"And will you answer?"

"Oh, you want me to answer, do you? Why in thunder didn't you say so before? Well, I like it well enough."

"But perhaps you don't like getting caught?"

"Oh, I don't mind it once in awhile."

"Perhaps you know what your fate will be?"

"Can't say I do, old snake-in-the-grass."

"You will be bound at the stake early to-morrow, as the Indians intend to break up the camp and attack the block house."

"Show. Why, how do you happen to know, old parchment skin?"

"Because they have told me so."

"Well I heard 'em muttering something about it; but la' sakes, Squire, you can't never put no dependence in what them critters say."

"Perhaps you think they will not carry out a threat they have once made?"

"Oh, no; they'll do it if they kin."

"By the way, what has become of your red-skinned champion, White Panther?"

"That's something yer'll have ter find out fer yerself if yer want to know."

"He seems to have deserted you in your hour of need?"

"Ya'as, 'p'raps he's got enough to do ter mind his own business."

"Why then did you meddle with other people's business? Did you not have enough to do to mind your own?"

"Lor bless ye, Squire. I allus was an orful meddlesome ole critter."

"If you had not been, you would not be here?"

"Wal, p'raps I won't be a great while longer as it is?"

"No, you'll soon be in the happy hunting grounds."

"P'raps you intend going there some day?"

"Of course."

"Then, if yer please, I'll take a ticket fur the other place."

"Don't worry! you'll get there without a ticket."

"Oh, yes. I'll just mention your name to old Beeizebub, and I guess I'll get in all right."

"Well, I'll see you soon again," said the Squire.

"You had better see me all you want to now, while you have the chance, kase I'm goin' ter take a vacation to-night, and I ain't agoin' ter leave my address ter fear of bein' pestered ter death by visitors."

The Squire walked away, and again spoke to Big Owl:

"Big Owl, be sure that prisoner of yours don't get away. You had better not have any fooling about it, but kill him while you have a good chance."

"Big Owl will kill when sun he rise again."

About an hour before sunset, Black Patch arrived in camp, and after talking a few moments with the Squire, he sought the prisoner and said to him:

"If white brave tell Injun where to find White Panther, perhaps he let you go."

"Ef red nigger let me go perhaps I'll tell him something about White Panther."

"No. White brave must first tell where White Panther be."

"Wal, you red nigger, ef you will take about ten steps and look in that thar tall tree over thar, you'll see him."

Jed had worked his right hand and arm free, and had contrived in some way to loosen the thongs that bound him sufficiently to allow him to stoop and pick up a large stone, which he held behind him, and when Black Patch had taken five of the ten steps, Jed let the stone fly, hitting the renegade on the right shoulder and crushing the bones.

Black Patch gave a yell of mingled rage and pain and fell to the ground. Some of the Indians hastened to the rescue, and after carrying the wounded man to a tent, they again bound Jed, all the while uttering dreadful threats of vengeance.

Once more Jed was left to himself. "There," said he, "I 'spose that'll add some to my dish to-morrow, but I might as well have a little fun out of this affair as for them pesky var-

mints to have it all. I guess that miserable cuss won't dance at my funeral, for judging by his looks he feels pretty well blumfudicated."

CHAPTER IV.

Black Patch was rendered unable to go with the Squire as he had intended, and knowing that old Quitewah would not deliver up the girl to the Squire, Big Owl sent with him the three Indians who had carried her there. On arriving at the hove they found the old hag in a very unenviable frame of mind, looking miserable enough, with her head done up in a rag. One of the Indians said to her:

"Where pale face squaw?"

"Gone!" she replied.

"What!" cried the Squire, springing forward and grasping her by the throat.

The Indians forced him to let go his hold, and after giving her time to recover her breath, the Indian who had before questioned her said:

"Tell Spotted Bear where the pale-face girl has gone."

The old woman than said:

"Quitewah was sitting in the door of her hut smoking, and thought white squaw was sleeping, but when Quitewah was busy thinking, white devil got up and stole toward Quitewah like a snake and struck her; then Quitewah knew no more and white girl run away."

The Squire was in a great rage, and after cursing the old hag and telling Jack to follow him, he left the hut. They proceeded at once toward the hut where they were to meet Bill and Jake, where they found those two worthies busily talking together.

"You cursed blundering fools have mixed things up well, haven't you?" said the Squire. "What in the devil did you undertake the job for if you hadn't the brains and courage to carry it out?"

Bill and Jake had come to the conclusion that the Indians might at any time attack the block house and capture or kill the inmates, and then they would have no one to offer a reward

for Leonora, therefore they deemed it best to sell her to the Squire, pocket the money and have everything off their minds. Accordingly when the Squire had delivered his last speech Bill said:

"What's the row, Squire?"

"Row? Enough row, I should say. The girl has again made her escape."

"Wal, why do yer fire up so at us?" inquired Jake.

"If you blockheads had done your work right the girl would now be in my possession."

"Now see here, Squire, what'll give us if we'll find her for you?"

"Five thousand dollars to the man that brings her to my mansion to-night.. But why do you ask? Do you hope to find her, or have you done so already?"

"We found her wandering around, not knowing which way to go, so we just gobbled her and have her safe."

"Do not fail, then, to bring her to me to night."

"But the five thousand dollars; do we get that to-night—C. O. D?"

"Yes, fool. Only bring her to me and you shall have it."

"Come on then, Jake, for we have only enough time to prepare the girl and take her to the Squire's mansion."

They left the hut and started in the direction of Bill's house.

The Squire paid Jack the money he had promised him for his share of the work in the rescue of Leonora, and then the two men separated, the Squire going at once to his mansion to await the coming of the two villains who were to bring poor Leonora to him.

The Squire owned a very large estate, and situated upon it was a large and imposing-looking stone mansion. He had in his employ, besides his negro slaves, many white men, all of the same appearance and stamp as Jack, Bill and Fat Jake, though perhaps the most of them had a little more honor.

The Squire had gone to the block-house, not for protection, for he was on friendly terms with the Indians, with whom he did much trading and feared nothing from them; but he had said he wished to warn the Judge of the approaching attack, and had remained to help guard Leonora.

In one wing of his house the windows were of the smallest panes of glass, and were barred with heavy iron bars like prison windows. In one of these rooms the Squire was seated

before a large desk. He at length arose, and after pacing the room for some time he rang a bell and resumed his seat before the desk. Soon an old negress made her appearance and stood respectfully regarding the Squire, as if waiting for some orders from him. At length she said:

"Well, massa?"

"What do you want here, you jade?"

"Why, didn't you ring, massa?"

"Did I? Very likely I did. How did you find your prisoner, Martha?"

"De same as ever, massa."

"Apparently in good health?"

"Yes, massa."

After a few moments of silence the Squire said:

"Make the cell next to hers ready, Martha, for another lady."

"Another, massa?"

"Yes, and make haste about it, too, for I expect her at any moment."

"But does Miss Theresa know, massa?"

"No; I have taken no pains to inform her. But don't stand there wasting time. Go and do as I bid you."

"But, massa—"

"Well?"

"My daughter?"

"What of her?"

"Now that you have my poor Zoe in your power you surely will not turn her off for another?"

"Don't worry about Zoe. You know I could never take a malatto girl for a wife, although Zoe is beautiful enough to grace my home; but she shall remain with me here as before. Go now to your work."

The old negress now left the room, and going through a long dark hallway she came at length to a heavily barred door. Taking a bunch of keys from the folds of her turban, she selected one that fitted the lock of the door which, when she had turned the key, swung slowly and noiselessly back, revealing a long flight of stairs which led to a number of subterranean apartments, one of which the old negress unlocked and opened. She was busily engaged in arranging the room when a voice from the next room called:

"Martha! Martha! Is it you?"

"Yes, Miss Theresa."

"What are you doing in that room?"

"Fixing it, for a young lady."

"For a young lady?"

"Yes, Miss Theresa."

"Who is she? What is her name?"

"Don't know, missey."

"Alas! another of his poor victims, I fear. When will she come?"

"To-night."

"What does the Squire intend to do with her?"

"Marry her, missey."

"Marry her?" almost screamed the lady. "How does he propose to do that, when I am already his wife?"

"Every one thinks you are dead."

"But I will soon undeceive them. Go, Martha, and tell the Squire that unless he wants trouble, he will come to me at once."

Martha informed the Squire that the lady wished to see him, and he obeyed the summons and went to the call.

"Well, Theresa?"

"Well?" she replied.

"What do you want with me?"

"What do you want with the young lady you are going to bring here?"

"That you may perhaps know later."

"But I know already. You wish to make her your wife."

"Well?"

"Squire Morton, that you shall not do. I will not allow it!"

"Indeed! May I know how you propose to prevent anything I undertake?"

"Yes, I will tell her that I am already your wife."

"Theresa, I hope you will not make a fool of yourself. She does not wish to marry me, any way, but I shall force her to. That is why I am going to bring her here."

"But she will not be your lawful wife. I am the only one that you can legally claim."

"Then why need it trouble you, no matter how many wives I take?"

"Because, instead of taking more, I wish you to reinstate me."

"What! when everybody believes you to be dead? No, Theresa, that would never do."

"As you like; but I tell you, if you attempt to carry out your plans you will regret it."

"And I tell you that if you attempt to interfere with me, you will bitterly rue it."

"Very well, we shall see *what* we shall see. You can go now, Squire Morton, and I hope you won't forget what I have said."

"Thank you, Theresa, and now good-bye."

The Squire ascended the stairs, and after carefully locking the door, again entered the room where we first found him. Soon after footsteps were heard outside, and the old negress ushered in Bill and Jake, who between them bore the unconscious form of Leonora, which, at a sign from the Squire, they deposited upon a sofa. The old negress again left the room, and then Bill said:

"Thar, Squire, I reckon we've got her all right for yer now; so, if yer pleases, we'd like to see the color of the swag and a chance to lay down and rest our weary bones."

The Squire counted out the promised amount of money, giving two thousand and five hundred to each, and then once more pulled the bell, and again the old negress appeared upon the scene, to whom Squire Morton said:

"Conduct these two men to a comfortable bed, and then come back here to me."

The old wench did as she was bidden, and soon returned to the Squire. Together they lifted Leonora from the sofa and bore her to the cell which had been that very evening prepared for her. Laying her on a bed, they left the room and locked the door. The Squire paused before the door of the apartment occupied by Theresa, and said:

"Theresa, are you asleep?"

"No."

"You will have no chance to talk with the young lady whose cause you so warmly espouse, until morning, as she has been drugged and will sleep until day dawns."

"There is time enough for that," replied she. "I think it doubtful if she needs to be warned against you."

The Squire now followed the negress up the stairs and again entered the room he had so lately left, and throwing himself

upon the sofa was soon soundly sleeping, not even disturbed by a dream.

The next morning before daylight Leonora awoke, feeling a severe pain in her head and her brain clouded. Her limbs were weak and a burning thirst parched her throat. After looking around her for a little while she at last made up her mind that she was in an altogether different place from the one in which she went to sleep. As the peril and the length of her captivity increased, her courage grew stronger, and she spoke aloud:

"Well, it seems my prison is to be changed so often, that it may prevent any one from following and rescuing me. I wonder whether I am rescued again or am still a prisoner to a new party?"

"A prisoner," came a voice from the next room.

"So! so! it seems I have a companion, and pray who may you be. My jailer?"

"No; I am a prisoner like yourself."

"Impossible! But whom have we to thank?"

"Squire Sim Morton."

"I thought as much. But, lady, why has he imprisoned you?"

"Because he married me ten years ago for my money, and preferring the money without the incumbrance of me, and being too cowardly to kill me, he imprisoned me here, and circulated the report of my death."

"But you do not mean to tell me that he has kept you here in this dungeon for ten long years?"

"Oh, no! We lived together five years, until he tired of me, and probably having become enamored of a new face, he shut me up here."

"Then you are his wife Theresa?"

"Yes."

"But he buried you?"

"No, he buried a log."

"But he actually wept bitterly over the casket."

"Of that I have no doubt."

"My God! Is it possible that such a villain can live among respectable people without being found out?"

"You see it is not only possible, but it is so."

"Good God, and he would have made me his wife, never troubling himself about you."

"Yes. He is capable of doing anything that is mean and wicked. But if you do not object to telling me, I should like to know your name?"

"My name is Leonora Houghton, and my father is Judge Houghton, who owns the block house."

"Oh, yes, I remember him; but have you not a sister. It seems to me I saw two young girls."

"Yes, I have a sister, Lois, by name; and also a brother, Lionel."

"But they will of course find you?"

"I fear not. My places of concealment have been so often changed, I think that it would be almost impossible to find me."

She then told Theresa of all that had happened to her since her abduction from home, and received in return her sincere and heartfelt sympathy.

"How can I tolerate that man's presence for one moment? I sincerely hope he will not make his appearance this morning, for in my present state of mind I might say some thing that I should regret."

"He will surely come and that before long, and if you do not wish to talk with him, you had better feign to be asleep."

"Thanks, I will act upon your suggestion and pretend sleep. Oh, the villain! I would like to have him in my power as he now has me. I would let him know the opinion of the woman he wishes to marry in regard to Squire Morton. But hush—some one is coming."

Squire Morton came to Leonora's cell and finding her sleeping, he went to the apartment of Theresa, whom he found reclining on a bed, her back turned towards him.

"Theresa!"

"Well?"

"I wish to talk with you while my prisoner is sleep."

"Well!"

"I do not wish you to talk with her!"

"No?"

"No."

"But I shall."

"Not in the way you seem inclined to do."

"How about that, pray?"

"Against me. Show her no attention whatever. Do you hear?"

"Perfectly well."

"And will obey?"

"No!"

"It will be worse for you."

"How so?"

"Because I shall kill you."

"If you can."

"I shall certainly do so."

"You can commence just as soon as you like."

"Theresa, what do you mean? Do you wish to anger me and make me kill you?"

"It seems you have made your mind up to do that already, and I might as well give you cause."

"Only on condition that you disobey me."

"As I most certainly shall."

"Then by Heaven I will kill you."

"Try it."

In a great rage Squire Morton left the room and ascended the stairs, while Theresa and Leonora resumed their conversation.

CHAPTER V.

Let us now return to Jed, whom we left tied to a tree. The Indians were very indignant at the treatment Black Patch had received at his hands, and they took savage delight in torturing him by pinching, stabbing and in every conceivable manner producing suffering. The squaws eagerly joined in the persecution of the poor fellow, who paid very little attention to them, and they finally left him.

That night fearing he might again loosen his cords, they bound him with green thongs. While Jed was busy thinking and trying to plan some way of escape, in the night, he felt the thongs that bound him suddenly give way, and he quickly and quietly sank to the ground. Turning round he crept upon his hands and knees after a retreating form which was directly in front of him. Rapidly yet stealthily leaving the Indian encampment he followed as fast as his bruised and aching limbs would permit him, and when at last his guide arose to his feet, Jed did likewise; and when his deliverer gave a low peculiar whistle, there soon appeared upon the scene three others, whom Jed recognized as White Panther, Lionel, Arthur and James.

The Indian simply said "come," and all turned and followed him in silence. Soon they arrived at the water's edge, when the Indian procured a boat, which they entered. Panther and James seized the oars, and the Indian said "cross river." After crossing the river they rowed some distance up the stream, when the Indian said, "stop boat." He then directed them to get out and wade ashore, and, getting out last, gave the boat a violent push into the river, and then joined his companions, who were waiting for him on the shore.

Again White Panther took the lead, the rest following. They climbed up a steep rock, clinging to the shrubs and vines that covered it. At last they stood out upon a sort of shelf of rock, projecting far over the river, and at a dizzy height above.

The Indian now disappeared in a clump of bushes, and the rest followed, and beheld White Panther holding back an immense black bear skin, which covered an aperture in the side of the rock. He motioned them to enter, which they did without a word. After crawling along on their hands and knees for a few moments, they found themselves able to stand on their feet.

The Indian lighted a torch, and disclosed a large, spacious cavern, with piles of skins on the floor, and skins of various kinds hung upon the walls. The Indian brought forward dried meats, which he placed upon a kind of bench; then disappearing through a hole, or sort of door, in the wall soon returned with a large gourd full of water.

They all ate heartily, being very hungry, especially Jed, who was nearly famished. After all were fully satisfied Jed said:

"I reckon you'd better git to the block-house as soon as yer can an' git ready fer an attack ter-morrow night. Have yer got the gal?"

"No."

"Where in the devil is she?"

"Injun, he know."

"Then why in thunder ain't yer got her?"

"Come fer old Jed to go an' help git her."

"Then yer had better go to the block-house first and warn them, and by the time yer git back I can tramp with yer after Miss Leny."

"Ole Jed, lay down on skins, go sleep. Young braves, come with Injun, no time to lose. Ole Jed, don't yer leave Injun's cache till he come back fer yer." So saying the Indian left the cave, followed by Lionel, Arthur and James, who, though very tired, felt obliged to do as the Indian thought best. Just as the sun arose, they came in sight of the block-house. The Indian then said:

"Go to big house, an' git some sleep. Tell ole man that yer hear in woods that Injuns will try to kill all in big house to-night. Don't tell yer see ole Jed or White Panther. Say only git ready to fight. Now, Injun, he go. Good moon." And with that he left them, and disappeared in the forest.

"Why, what can he mean?" cried James. "I surely thought he would stay and help us."

"Never fear," said Lionel; "he will do all in his power to

help us. I have no doubt he has some plot in his cunning brain at this moment, for our good."

They now knocked at the gate, and after they had entered, Lionel said to the guard who had admitted them—

"Is any one stirring in the block-house?"

"No."

"Then we must seek for rest at the negro quarters."

They proceeded to the kitchen and knocked at the door. It was opened by Pete, who exclaimed—

"Who dar?"

"It's us. Let us in."

"No, sar; not till yar tells me who us am."

"Open the door, you fool, and let us in. We want to get some sleep."

"Good Lordy, Massa Lion, am it you?"

"Yes, sir; it's me."

"I'se right glad ter see yer bressed face again. Walk right in, gemmen," and the door swung open wide to admit them. They threw themselves down upon the floor without more ado, for they were very tired. Pete started for the door, and Lionel exclaimed—

"Here you, Pete, where are you going?"

"Gwine for ter tell Massa Jedge."

"Come back here."

"He tell me for ter fotch him the news when you come."

"And I tel you to come back and hold your tongue."

Pete reluctantly came back, and assailed Lionel with all manner of questions.

"Been 'mong de Injuns, massa?"

"Yes."

"Find Miss Lenny?"

"No."

"Is de Injins gwine ter fight us?"

"Yes."

"Right away, massa?"

"Yes."

"Golly, can't we buy 'em off?"

"Yes."

"How much, massa?"

"They said if we'd give 'em a good-for-nothing old nigger, they would call it square."

Pete rolled up his eyes, and then said—

"They mean dat niggas, ole Jim Jones?"

"No, they said his name was Pete."

"Golly, massa, you didn't tell 'em you'd git 'em dis nigger?"

"No. But I will if you don't go away and let me sleep."

Pete went in search of the rest of the colored people, and told them that "Massa Lion done got back, and dem Injins tole him dat if h'd gib 'em ebery nigger in de block-house dey wouldn't kill de white folks, an' let Miss Lenny go, an' Massa Lion tole 'em ter come an' fight, an' de niggers would defend de block-house wid der las' breff."

This intelligence created quite a time among the darkies, and "Massa Lion" was lauded to the skies.

Judge Houghton, his sister and his daughter Lois, together with some of the neighbors, were sitting in a pleasant little room, when Lionel suddenly made his appearance. He stepped toward his father, who bowed stiffly and said:

"Perhaps, sir, you will condescend to explain why you disobeyed my orders and left this house, without first obtaining my permission."

"Father, the only excuse that I can offer is that, I desire to do my best to protect my beloved father and sister Lois. I wish to learn if possible something in regard to the threatened attack of which we have heard such mutterings lately."

"And you have learned?"

"That we may look for them to-night."

The ladies screamed with fright to learn that their lives were in such peril, but were reassured by hearing the Judge say:

"Go at once, my son, and double the guard, and have everything ready and every man armed. Say nothing to the negroes or you will frighten them to death. I will attend to them myself."

Lionel left the room and Lois followed him. They joined Arthur and James, and there she learned the villany of Squire Morton, but was cautioned to say nothing. By night everything was in readiness for the attack, and men, women and children were eagerly straining their eyes to get a glimpse of the enemy.

The negroes had all been summoned from the kitchen, and the men were given muskets and pistols and told to fight. The night was cloudy and soon the rain began to fall, the peals of thunder caused the woods to ring, and vivid flashes of lightning lit up the scene for a great distance around.

Soon Pete began to yell :

“Dar’s de Injins—dar’s de red debbles! Hold me! hold onto me ’fore I lets out on ’em and slaughter’s ’em all!”

“Pete, hold your tongue.”

“Can’t, massa Lionel, kase I’se got to handle my fire-arms, an’ I wants my han’s free.”

“There are no Indians around yet. Why do you want to give a false alarm?”

“Twan’t no false alarm, massa. Dar, dar dey be.”

A flash of lightning revealed a row of hideously-painted savages, almost naked, and rendered more horrible by the paint being washed in streaks by the rain. They evidently expected to surprise the whites, as all around the block-house was darkness, and silence reigned supreme. The scene presented by the glare of the lightning was superbly grand, and was calculated to inspire awe and a feeling of veneration in the hearts of men, rather than hatred and murder. But to these savage beings the scene was not new, and the only desire of their hearts was revenge and victory over the white people.

About midnight they set up a yell and made a rush for the fort, and then the fight began.

For a time not much harm was done on either side. But suddenly a tall, dark form darted across the enclosure, felled the guard to the ground, opened the gate and in rushed the enemy in swarms.

Things looked discouraging for our friends, for another mass of Indians suddenly appeared, and in despair Lois cried out :

“My God, they are reinforced, and we are lost!”

“God help us now,” said the Judge.

“Nay, don’t despair!” cried Lionel. “Do you not see who leads the second party? See, see, it is White Panther!”

And sure enough it was the Indian, the tried friend of the whites, at the head of a hundred warriors. The enemy finding themselves attacked in the rear, fled in terror, never thinking of their dead and dying.

It is not necessary to describe the reception given White Panther and his warriors; we will leave the reader to imagine that, and return to Leonora. As soon as the Squire had left them, Theresa said :

“What do you think of him now?”

“I think him capable of doing anything bad and wicked, and I tremble when I think of what your fate may be.”

"Have no fears for me. I shall soon be out of this."

"Do you mean you will escape?"

"Yes."

"I hope you may, and only wish it was in **my** power to aid you. But where shall you go?"

"Straight to the block-house."

"But you can never find it alone."

"I will trust to luck."

"But how will you make your escape?"

"I have been able by the aid of a piece of wire and a small dagger to turn the lock of my door. To-night, after the old negress has brought my supper, she will bring yours. I wish you then to keep her for a time by conversing with her. I will then creep up stairs and out at the door, and shall be governed by circumstances after that."

"I will gladly do anything in my power to aid you."

They were again interrupted by the Squire, who came to Leonora's cell, and this time he found her awake and ready for him.

"Good morning, Miss Houghton."

"Good morning, Squire Morton."

"I hope you are in good health and spirits this morning."

"Indeed, I hope so too."

"You must be fatigued."

"Quite so, thank you."

"Leonora, have you thought over what I said to you the day before your abduction from the fort?"

"I have had quite enough besides that to think of."

"Very true, still I hope you have thought it over, and have altered your decision?"

"I have *not* thought it over, and see no reason for so doing, as I feel confident I shall *never change my mind*."

"Miss Houghton, you are severe."

"Squire Morton, you are brutal!"

"Perhaps you will kindly tell me what I have done to merit such treatment from you."

"Such treatment?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand you."

"Then in plain language, why am I detained here a prisoner?"

"A prisoner!"

"Yes. A prisoner; do you understand?"

"Why, I rescued you last night from two villains who had you a prisoner."

"Indeed!"

"Pon my word I did."

"Then why did you not take me at once to my father?"

"Because my house was nearer and it was not safe to go through the woods at night."

"Then why did you not send to my father?"

"Leonora, I see you are inclined to doubt me. So if you must hear the truth I will tell you."

"Try it for once."

"The block house is burned to the ground and your father with the rest of the inmates murdered."

"Indeed! How sad."

"You do not seem to take the unhappy fate very much to heart."

"No. I am taking it under consideration."

"Under consideration?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I am trying to determine what other lie you had in your brain when you decided upon this one as the best."

"You do not believe me?"

"No."

"I am sorry."

"No doubt."

"Miss Houghton, let us cease this unnecessary talking."

"I have no objections."

"I again ask your hand in marriage."

"May I ask what you intend doing with Mrs. Morton, number one?"

"Explain yourself, Leonora."

"Squire Morton, don't be a fool and play innocent any longer. You know exactly what I mean. I know all about Theresa, as the world will soon know. I also know that you brought me here with the intention of forcing me to marry you. Squire Morton, you are a very devil!"

"You certainly speak plainly."

"That is something no one can say of you."

"Now, Miss Houghton, I will be plain with you. In one week from to-day you will be my wife or you will be dead."

"Or with my folks."

"Do not try to comfort yourself with that idea, for they are all pretty well done for by this time."

"I do not believe you."

"It matters not to me whether you believe me or not. You are in my power, and you will find it hard to get out again."

So saying he left her.

The poor, persecuted girl burst into tears, and was comforted by Theresa.

CHAPTER VI,

The next day White Panther left his warriors to guard the block house and departed, saying—

“Me go to cave down river an’ get Jed; den he go with Injun an’ get white squaw.”

“May I not be allowed to go with you?” pleaded Arthur,

“No, too many spoil all. You stay here, an’ don’t tell any one where Injun gone.”

Several times in his journey White Panther came near being discovered by Indians who were scattered all through the woods. However, he reached the cave all right, and found old Jed busy cleaning his gun. He looked up as White Panther entered and said—

“Well, Injun, how goes everything at the big house?”

“Big house, he no go. Ole Jed he crazy.”

“No, Injin, you don’t understand. I mean, did you lick the Injins like the devil?”

“Um! Ole Jed he say right this time.”

“You completely blumfusticated ’em, did you?”

“Injun he lick ’um.”

“How many scalps yer got?”

The Indian held up his hands twice.

“Twenty?”

“Um.”

“Where be they?”

“Injun leave ’em at big house.”

“Did you go to yer tribe for help?”

“Um! Injun he git.”

“How many?”

“Ten time Injun’s fingers.”

“Oh, ho! I reckon yer surprised old Big Owl some. But when are we going after the little squaw?”

“Injun take old Jed to her now. Come.”

And without another word he left the cave, followed by old Jed.

They reached the cabin occupied by Bill and Judy Higgins, and were obliged to wait until night to surprise Judy while she was alone. After Bill had gone Jed and White Panther entered the cabin. Judy was not surprised at first, thinking they wanted to see her husband. But when they demanded the surrender of Leonora she trembled in every limb.

"I tell you she is not here," said Judy.

"You lie, you old hag!" said Jed.

"Injun see you put her down in hole," said White Panther, pointing to the trap.

"Open that door and go down ahead of us, and that mighty quick," said Jed.

They followed her into the cellar where White Panther saw them carry Leonora. but she was gone.

"What have you done with her?" asked Jed.

"I have not seen her."

"Who took her from here?"

"Fat Jake."

"And your husband. Where did they carry her to?"

"I don't know."

"Come, no lying, what have they done with her?"

"Took her to Squire Morton's."

"That's all we want to know."

"If Bill finds out I told he'll kill me."

"He won't find out unless you tell him."

They now left the cabin, and when outside White Panther said:

"What ole Jed do now?"

"Watch that devil, Squire Morton."

"O-o-o! O-o-o! h-o-o-t, tr-r-hoo!"

White Panther stopped and listened.

"What's the matter, White Panther?"

"Ole Jed hear owl hoot?"

"Yas. What of it?"

"That be no owl."

"The devil!"

"No, be no devil either."

"Then what is it?"

"That be signal."

"What signal?"

"Injun go find out."

"Go where?"

"Signal come from this way. Injun see."

The Indian left Jed to his own thoughts, which were uttered aloud.

"Wall, I'll be goldarned ef that Injun don't completely flabagast me. Gosh, how he put for that owl hoot, which I'd never known but what et war an owl over my head. Guess it was; darned if I don't think that Injun's fooled this time, any how. If it's them darned Injuns I'll wish I'd gone with him so's to have a finger in that pie. I'm spilin' for a fight. 'Sposen it war that devil Black Patch, and I warn't there to give him a little fun. Ef Panther don't come back purty soon, I'll foller him, darned ef I don't. Maybe he's got himself into a fix; don't believe but what those Injuns has got him. Damme if I can stand it another minute, so here goes to foller that — Hullo, Panther, what's the row. Was it Injuns?"

"Um. Yes."

"How many?"

"Good many. Big council."

"Big council, eh! What about?"

"Big Owl he there with Black Patch. He get all well, and got another black patch on his other eye where he fell when old Jed he fire stone."

"What's the council about?"

"Big house."

"Are they going to attack it again?"

"Yes, that what Big Owl say."

"And of course the rest are all willing?"

"Um! Black Patch he say, 'Um! me go to big house, catch ole Jed an' take scalp.'"

"O, he mought git his own skulp tooken 'fore he got half way there. But if the Injuns are goin' to attack the big house again, it won't do ter carry the girl there, if we get her."

"No, but take young squaw to Injun's cave in rocks."

"That's so, Injun; it's the best place we could have, for the mean catamounts don't know anything about it; but I reckon we'd better go towards the Squire's."

They were startled when about half way there by the crackling of some bushes close by, and Jed instinctively raised his rifle, when a voice cried, "Don't fire," and a gloriously beautiful woman stepped from amongst the trees, her long wavy black hair falling nearly to her feet. She carried no visible weapons and her face was white as snow, causing her large,

luminous dark eyes to look doubly large and wild. As she stood before them no word was spoken. Jed, in amazement, gave utterance to the expressive—

“Ahem!”

“Can you, sir, direct me to the block-house owned by Judge Houghton?”

“Yes, marm, but yer goin’ in directly the wrong direction.”

“Oh, I knew not where I was going; I was so confused and frightened!”

“Kinder dazed like, marm!”

“Is it far from here?”

“Yes, and it’s very dangerous goin’ through these woods. Ther Injins is all on the war path.”

“Oh, heaven, what can I do?”

“Ole Jed stay here, an’ White Panther take white squaw to big house.”

“Old Jed! Can it be possible? Are you Jed Pollard?”

“Yes, marm, that’s my cognomen.”

“Why, Leonora spoke of you as a friend who would surely rescue her, if it were a possible thing.”

“Miss Leny! Have you seen Miss Leny Houghton?”

“Yes; I left her but a few hours since.”

“Where? In God’s name, where?”

“A prisoner at the house of Squire Morton, from which I have just escaped, after being confined there for five years.”

“And who be you, marm?”

“His wife.”

“You ain’t the pretty wife that he said died five years ago, be ye?”

“I am Theresa Morton, the only wife Squire Morton ever had, and the only one he has a right to claim.”

“Then hadn’t you better go and let him know ye ain’t dead?”

“You do not understand. He has kept me a prisoner for five years and reported me dead.”

“Good God, what a villain! Mrs. Morton, ye had better not attempt ter go to the block house now, kase when he finds yer gone, he’ll scour the country fer ye. White Panther and I’ll take yer to his cave, and there ye’ll be safe, kase nobody don’t know nothin’ about it. We’ll find Miss Leny and take her away from that devil, and that mighty soon, or my name ain’t Jed Pollard.”

“Thanks, my kind friend. Of course I will gladly leave all

to you and your noble friend, and am only too glad to accept of your kind hospitality, and am ready to follow where you lead."

Jed and White Panther conducted her through the forest, part of the time carrying her, as if she were a child. When they reached the cave Theresa was delighted, feeling secure from her persecutor now. Was she indeed free? Could she again breathe the air of liberty, after having been shut up for five long, dreary years? She looked back upon the time of her captivity and wondered that she had not died, as her husband undoubtedly thought she would do. How her heart went out towards Leonora, who was left a close prisoner, to await what fate heaven only knew. How she prayed for success to attend the mission of White Panther and the noble old trapper.

After giving her such food as there was in the cave, with fresh, cool water, and pointing to a soft pallet of skins, Jed said:

"You can lay down there, marm, and rest as long as yer like. Panther and me'll sleep in thar and shall start long 'fore sunrise for the Squire's, as I reckon we shan't see yer 'fore we goes. But I think, marm, by to-morrow night Ole Jed'll have Miss Leny here with yer till it's safe to take ye to the fort."

So saying, he followed White Panther into an adjoining cavern, while Theresa, throwing herself upon the couch, was soon soundly sleeping.

Let us now return to Leonora. That night, after agreeing to keep the old negress while Theresa attempted to escape, the anxious ones waited breathlessly for her appearance. At last she came, and after giving Theresa her supper, she entered Leonora's cell with another tray.

"Good evening, auntie," said Leonora.

"Good ebenin', missy," said the old woman, in surprise.

"Can't you stay and chat with me a little while?"

"What yer want old nigger ter say?"

"Oh, I ony want you to talk with me. I am very lonely here with no one to speak to."

"Missy talks wid Miss Tressy in nex' room."

"Oh, no, not much; she talks but little. She seems very sad. Do you not pity her, auntie?"

"What for old nigger pity? No one pity poor old nigger."

"But, auntie, you have not been imprisoned for five long years as she has."

"Old nigger been slave many long years."

"True, auntie, but you have not been shut out from the sun and air in one close, lonely room. Have you any children, auntie?"

The face of the old negress softened for a moment, and she said—

"Yes, Martha got daughter."

"Is she here with you?"

"Yes."

"What is her name?"

"Zoe."

"Zoe! a pretty name. Is she pretty, Martha?"

"Massa Morton tink so. He, he, he!"

CHAPTER VII.

Leonora shuddered at this remark of the old woman's, but only said—

“I would like to see Zoe, Martha. Will you bring her to see me some time?”

“Martha ask Massa Morton.”

“Surely he could have no objections.”

“Old nigger have to ask him. Zoe his wife.”

“His wife! How many wives has he?”

“One—my Zoe.”

“But what of the one in the next room?”

“She same as dead.”

“But she is not dead, and he has married Zoe?”

“Nigger didn't say he marry. Zoe his slave wife.”

“And you are willing?”

“Why not? Nigger slave. White man no marry a colored gal.”

“But how does Zoe feel?”

“Zoe no have to work; she git silk gowns and heap of jewelry. Zoe have all she wants, so she happy; so as long as she happy dis yer nigger don't care.”

“But think of the wrong she is doing poor Theresa?”

“What business of Missy Theresy. He no want her; she dead. My Zoe is beautiful. Dis yer nigger kill Missy Theresy if she meddle wid Zoe.”

Leonora was too much shocked at the want of feeling of justice on the part of the old negress to talk more, and after asking her if she wanted anything else Martha left her. She went straight to Squire Morton and told him almost word for word her conversation with Leonora.

“Take Zoe to her at your peril,” said the Squire, “and, hereafter, Martha, hold no conversation with her. Do you hear?”

Sullenly muttering “Yes, massa,” Martha left the room.

While Martha and Leonora were talking Theresa carefully left her room, stole up the stairs and reached the hall above. It was very dark and she was at a loss to know which way to go. Feeling her way along with her hands on the wall she at last reached a door which was a little ajar. She heard voices within and recognized the Squire's. Hiding in a little niche close by she heard him bid some one good-night. Soon a man came out, and it being very dark Theresa ventured to follow him, and soon found herself in the open air.

Taking an opposite direction from that pursued by the stranger, she rushed breathlessly on until she met Jed and White Panther.

The next morning Squire Morton, all smiles and in good humor with himself, determined to pay Leonora a visit. Accordingly he rang for Martha, and when that worthy appeared he said to her—

“Martha, I am going to visit my young lady, and when Bill comes tell him to wait for me, but do not disturb me by calling me.”

“Yes, massa,” grinned Martha, and left the room.

The Squire was destined to have his good nature a little disturbed, as the reader has without doubt already anticipated. Going directly to the cell of Leonora he entered and said—

“Good-morning, dearest.”

“Sir!”

“I said good-morning.”

“So you said yesteday morning.”

“But this is not yesterday morning.”

“No, thank God!”

“Aye! you may well say ‘thank God,’ my darling, for it brings you nearer to your wedding morning.”

“Indeed, I hope so.”

“Then you have at last come to your senses, and are ready to be my own sweet wife.”

“You are mistaken, sir. I have only the more firmly determined to do nothing so vile and contemptible.”

“Why vile and contemptible?”

“Vile, because you have a wife already living; contemptible, because you, of all the men on this earth, I most loathe and despise.”

“But if you still object to my first wife, I will kill her.”

“How very foolish!”

"Why so?"

"Before you can kill you must find."

"Easy enough to be done."

"Doubted."

"I do not understand you."

"Is it possible? Well, you may learn later; meanwhile, if you hear any news, I would like for you to inform me."

"In regard to the burning of the block-house?"

"Oh, anything that would interest me."

"If you will excuse me now, I will pay a short visit to wife number one."

"O, certainly. I hope you will enjoy your call."

He left Leonora and entered Theresa's room, and soon Leonora heard him give utterance to a fearful oath; and then he came back to Leonora's room and exclaimed—

"Where is Theresa?"

"Indeed! I know not; probably among friends by ~~this~~ time."

"You knew she had escaped?"

"Yes."

"And you aided her?"

"To the best of my feeble ability."

"D— you! When did she go?"

"Quite early last evening."

"How foolish of her. The Indians have surely killed her by this time."

"You think so? Have you any hired for that purpose?"

"Or, if she escapes them, she will get lost in the woods and starve?"

"How very sad. Why do you not at once go in search of your beloved wife?"

"I will; but rest assured of one thing, she will never reach your friends, for they are all dead."

"You are a liar!"

"What! If you were anything but a woman, I would tell you to the floor."

"Oh, don't mind; play I am a man."

"Do you wish to exasperate me more?"

"I just as lieve!"

"Take care; I can't bear everything, even from you."

"No more can I."

"If Theresa is not recaptured ~~and~~ dead by night, you may well tremble."

"That is something I never do, unless very cold or somewhat alarmed."

"There will be enough to frighten you."

"Why, your very presence alarms me, and one glance at your face frightens me, fearing I may behold you again."

"The Squire now went to his room above, in a towering rage, and found there his tool, Bill.

"What's the matter, Squire?"

"Matter? H—'s to pay."

"In what way?"

"That she devil, Theresa, has escaped, and been gone since last night. Go at once and put Jake, Jack and every cussed Indian on the trail."

"But the shower of last night would hide the trail."

"Go and see if it has."

"And if it has where shall I look for her?"

"She would probably hunt for the block house."

"I'm gone, Squire; I'll report soon."

He went out and left Squire Morton walking the floor, chewing his tongue and swearing at every step.

It was now nearly noon and our friends, White Panther and Jed, concealed behind one of the outhouses belonging to Squire Morton's estate, saw Bill as he emerged from the house, and they followed him. He had not gone far when he met Fat Jake and Jack.

"Just the ones I want to see, fellers."

"Why, what's up?"

"The Squire has lost his wife."

"Lost his wife?"

"Yes; not the one we carried to him, but the one he has kept shut up for a long time, and every one thinks she is dead. If she reaches the block house, or tells any one around here, it will make it hot for Morton."

"The devil!"

"Now that's just what I said."

"Wal, what yer goin' ter do?"

"Do? Find her of course!"

"She can't have gone far. What direction are you goin' ter look fur her?"

"Around the block house."

"How are you going to find out if she's thar?"

"Ketch one of the niggers and make him tell."

"Well, come on, we'll go with you."

Fortune seemed to favor them, for when near the block house who should they see but Pete, who, against orders, had gone outside of the enclosure to get water and show his bravery to the rest of the negroes. Hearing footsteps, Pete looked up, and seeing it was not Indians approaching him, he lost all fear and said:

"Good morning, gemmens."

"Good morning, sir. Can you tell me if a young lady has been seen wandering around here?"

"No, sah. Has ye lost one?"

"Yes. My friends and myself were taking a young lady through the forest to visit some friends. We found the house where her friends were living burned to the ground, and were afraid the Indians might be rising against the whites, and then, in some unaccountable manner we lost her, and felt assured the Indians had risen."

"Yes, sah, de Indians am playing de debil; we hab lost a young lady from the block house and don't know nothing 'bout where she am gone. I should hab gone myself, sar, for to look after her, but yer see, sar, dey has ter hab me at de block house for ter keep de Injins from burning it to the ground and killing dem all. I'se mighty glad I'se seen yer, sar; dreffle sorry 'bout de poor young lady, sar. Won't yer come in de house, sar, an' see the Jedge?"

"No, we must go at once to find some trace of the poor girl. Good day, Mr.—"

"Hayter, sir; Mr. Pete Hayter. Say, what mought your name be?"

"Stepanfetchem, sir."

"Good day, Mr. Go-an-bring-'em, good day, sar; hope you'll find de poor young lady, sar, an' ef ye sees anything of our Miss Leny, sar, I hope you'll let me know."

"I will certainly do so, sir; good day, sir."

"Dat am a mighty fine gemman. My 'pinion is he'll get de gal. Wish he'd gone to see de ole Judge. Golly, wonder if dem Injins goin' to fight to-night?"

"Nigger tell all he know in forest. He much big fool. Ugh."

"Lordy, Gody! what dat, nigger hear?"

"Nigger go in house an' keep his mouth shut."

Pete waited to hear no more, but rushed into the house and

told the negroes he had been "'tacked by five hundred Injins an' bullet holes all froo him an' skulped." He found the Judge and Lionel, and told them the same story; but after much coaxing and threatening they got pretty nearly the facts of the case.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Theresa awoke the next morning she found that Jed and White Panther had gone, and she was alone. She found in the little cave a pistol, cartridges and a small dirk, which something prompted her to conceal about her person, and it was well she did, for she soon had an opportunity to use them, and being naturally a brave woman she did not shrink when the time came.

She amused herself by looking about the cavern, admiring the beautiful skins and ornaments of bone, shells and silver—White Panther's badges of honor.

She heard a slight noise near the entrance, and with great presence of mind concealed herself behind a couch of skins. Soon she saw an Indian enter; he looked about, and at last began decking himself with the shells and dragging the largest and most beautiful skins near the entrance of the cave. At last he approached the pile of skins behind which Theresa was concealed. Without a moment's hesitation she took aim and fired. The Indian, with a groan, fell to the ground, dead.

Theresa could not endure the thought of staying in the cave with the dead Indian, so she went to the entrance and waited, wishing anxiously for the return of Jed and White Panther. Would they *never* come? Soon she heard talking. Could it be the Indian coming to life, and had he followed her through that long, dark passage to the entrance?

No, that was nonsense, she told herself. Dead men can't talk, and if they could why should he haunt her; what had she done except to defend her own life? Surely self-preservation was and is the first law of nature. She owed him no spite, and wished him a safe journey to the happy hunting ground. Again she heard some one talking, and it sounded near the entrance. She could even distinguish what they were saying.

"I surely saw one of the Indians come around here, and lost sight of him here in these bushes."

"What do you want of him? We are losing time hunting for him."

"He may have seen the woman somewhere, if not he can help us find her. Besides, those tracks led to the rock—"

"Yes, and there they left off."

"But they probably climbed the rocks—"

"And probably fell over in the dark—"

"Yes, but we are not sure. What can we tell the Squire?"

"That we have discovered her whereabouts, and then claim our own price for our knowledge."

"But we have no information to give—"

"Hear me through. We will inform him of course that she fell over the precipice of 'Devil's' rocks, and he will never know or ask if we saw her lying dead."

"But if she should turn up again alive and well?"

"How can he help himself? Besides, she won't; those tracks belonged to a white man and an Indian, so probably Big Owl has got her by this time."

"Then let us hasten back and tell the Squire. I am tired of doing so much dirty work for him, and want a breathing spell for a while."

"You always was a fool, Jack, about women, but you'll get over that in time, I reckon."

Their voices sounded farther and farther away, and Theresa knew that they had gone. She still sat silently waiting, and was soon cheered by the skins at the entrance being thrown back, and Jed and White Panther stood before her.

They were much surprised to find Theresa at the entrance of the cave, but when she explained to them her reason for not wishing to stay inside, they were still more surprised. They hastened inside, where they found the dead Indian.

"Well," said Jed, "I'll be goll darned ef yer haint a brave woman, and deserve a pile of money fur that piece of work. He's shot through the heart."

"Squaw, heap brave: Injun, he dress scalp, an' give to squaw."

"No, White Panther, I don't want his scalp."

"See here, Injin," said Jed, "I reckon you'd better keep it ef she don't want it, fur it's that pesky satan that tried to shoot you in the back last fall."

"Ugh, Snake-in-grass, Injin take scalp!"

So saying, he drew a knife and quickly took the scalp from

the dead man's head, and thrusting the bloody trophy in his belt, he dragged the body from the cave and rolled it over the cliff. Jed requested Theresa to go into the next apartment, and while she was gone he wiped up the blood stains, and when she returned all traces of the tragedy transacted there were gone.

She appreciated Jed's kind thoughtfulness and resolved to think no more of what she had done, being assured in her heart that she had only done what was right. She then told Jed of the conversation she had heard at the entrance of the cave, to which he replied.

"Yes! we heard 'em."

"Why, where were you?"

"Where we've been all day—right behind 'em, an' the pesky fools never knowed it."

Theresa was much disappointed when she saw that they did not bring Leonora, but Jed assured her that just as soon as it was possible to accomplish Leonora's escape it should be done.

Fat Jake, Bill and Jack returned to the Squire and were shown to his private room.

"Have you news?" asked the Squire looking up from his writing.

"In course we has," said Bill.

"Then spit it out at once."

"Wal, yer see, Squire, fur myself I'm willin' enough; but my friends helped me, an' I guess I'll have ter ask ter see the color of your bank-book first."

"You are never contented unless your eyes are resting upon money."

"Some folks are never contented unless their eyes are resting upon pretty women."

"Well, what is your price?"

"Wal, yer see, there's three on us, and' I guess five hundred will be enough."

"Five hundred! are you crazy?"

"Oh, no, though it's an awful small price."

"It's too much, and I won't pay it."

Bill said no more, and the three men arose to depart.

"Stop," said the Squire. "I suppose I shall have to pay your price, as there's no time to hire others to do my work. Here is your money. Now where is the girl?"

"Dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"Five hundred dollars for a dead woman! But are you sure she's dead?"

"Yes, dead certain."

"Tell me how you know it?"

Bill then told the story they had concocted, and which he thought more than likely to be true.

"You say there were signs of a white man and an Indian," said the Squire musingly.

"Yes. Why?"

"I was thinking of Jed Pollard and White Panther."

"Why, the Indians have killed Jed by this time."

"True; yet it does not seem possible that such great danger can be over."

"I reckon as how it is, Squire; an' now if yer hasn't nothin' more fur us ter do, we'll be gone."

"Nothing more at present; but do not fail to be here to-morrow night. I may want you."

"All right, Squire, I'll come." And the three men left the house and entered the woods

The next morning, bright and early, Jed and White Panther were on the Squire's grounds, and saw him come out from his house, and they followed him to the block-house, which he entered. A short time after White Panther entered and sought Lionel, and whispered something in his ear, then he and Panther left the house and went to the woods, where Jed was waiting for them. Jed told him all that had happened since he last saw him, and then said—

"Don't let on, youngster, that you have seen me, for the Squire thinks the Injins have made roast beef of me. I told you about the gal, thinkin' yer might have some fun with the Squire, seein' he thinks she's dead. And now Panther will stay at the block-house with his braves, in case of an attack, and if the Squire stays, you'd better kinder keep an eye on him ter see that he don't help the Injins ter kill yer all. You had better write a letter ter Miss Leny, an' I'll try and git it ter her, ter kinder cheer her up like."

Lionel wrote the note, and Jed, after taking it, bade him good-bye, and Lionel and White Panther returned to the house, where the Indian received a cordial welcome from all save the Squire, who said to the Judge—

"I wonder at your harboring Indians here, when you are hourly expecting an attack from them."

"White Panther is a true friend," said the Judge.

"One can never tell, they are such treacherous devils."

"Had it not been for White Panther and his braves, I fear we should now all be dead or in the power of the Indians. By the way, Panther, where is Jed?"

"Injuns ketch him."

"What have they done with him?"

"Kill! Panther kill all them same day."

Lionel left the room, and after telling James, Arthur and Lois all he had heard from Jed, returned with them and sat as if in deep meditation. At last he murmured—

"Tall, black eyes, black hair, beautiful red dress—"

"What did you say?" exclaimed the Squire, starting up and looking closely at Lionel.

"I? Nothing; that is, I was thinking."

Again he spoke.

"Five years is a long time to—"

The Squire sprang to his feet, and Lionel exclaimed—

"Excuse me; I am tired, and did not know I was thinking aloud."

The Squire abruptly left the room and went into the garden, where he paced back and forth muttering to himself.

"What did the fool mean? Can he know anything about Theresa? Pshaw! what foolishness! She is dead, and he has not left the block-house; yet it is strange that he should have so minutely described her. I wonder—"

"Theresa!"

"Who said Theresa? Oh, this is absurd. I am growing nervous, and if I keep on, I shall be afraid of my own shadow. Poor Theresa! I am sorry she is dead, and yet it is better so for while she lived I was always in fear of her being discovered and then I should have been ruined and—"

"Imprisoned."

"Some one is certainly here. Why don't you show yours if, whoever you are? By Heaven I will find you, and what I do— What is the matter with me? Something evil will surely befall me. I feel it. What if her body should be discovered and recognized. Pshaw! who could reach the bottom of the ravine of devil's rock. If I stay by myself much longer, I shall certainly turn fool. I will go into the house and have no more."

such foolish thoughts. Ah, there is Lois; what's that she's singing—

“And O so long a captive was she,
That when she escaped and was once more free”

“What the devil put that song into her head I wonder? Everything seems to put me in mind of Theresa. I will go into the house and take a glass of brandy, and try if that will banish these absurd ideas.”

CHAPTER IX.

The room in which Leonora was confined was in what was intended for and supposed to be the cellar. The windows were very small and barred with iron rods, though they were open to admit the air.

On the night after he had received the letter from Lionel, old Jed crept cautiously along on his hands and knees toward one of the windows, pausing frequently to listen for some sound. At length he reached the window, but all was dark within; he ventured to call, however, cautiously whispering:

"Miss Leny! Miss Leny!"

Leonora started up from a troubled sleep and said:

"I thought some one called me. I heard it very plainly; but alas, I must have been dreaming."

"Miss Leny!"

"Who calls me?"

"Old Jed; be yer thar?"

"Yes. 'Tis Jed, thank God."

"Jest reach yer hand outer the window; I've got sumthin' fur ye."

"I have it, Jed; but tell me, have you come to take me from this place?"

"Not to night, Miss Leny; there are too many around; but just as soon as the coast is clear we will rescue you. Miss Tressy—"

"Then you have seen her?"

"Yes."

"And she is safe?"

"Jest as safe as a kitten."

"Jed, tell me truly, is the block house burned?"

"Burned! No."

"And my friends have not fallen into the hands of the Indians?"

"No."

"Then that villain uttered a vile falsehood, just as I suspected."

"Did the Squire tell you such things as that?"

"Yes."

"Oh, what a rascal that man is."

"On the day that Theresa escaped he told me that if I did not marry him one week from that day he would confine me to this room, and with or without my consent I should become his mistress. Oh, Jed, what shall I do?"

"Jest tell him ter give yer a month, an' if nothin' comes up ter change yer mind ye'll marry him."

"Oh, Jed, I could never do that."

"Couldn't tell him that?"

"I mean I could never marry him."

"You would not have to. I'll git yer outer this soon, but I must not work too fast. Now I must go, for some one may catch me. I'll come ag'in to-morrow mornin' to find out what the Squire says about givin' yer a month ter get ready ter be married in. Good-bye, Miss Leny; cheer up, an' ye'il live ter see the rascally Squire severely punished for his many sins."

"Good-bye, Jed, and may God bless you. I'll try to cheer up. Ah, what a true friend Jed is! He would peril his own life to save his friends."

Squire Morton reckoned without his host when he spoke to Judge Houghton as he did. White Panther's lips curled with scorn, but he said nothing until the Squire re-entered the house, after communing with himself in the garden, and again said to the Judge:

"Judge, why do you not send this Indian and his warriors away? They will surely prove treacherous."

"If you think it best, Squire, I—"

"Father, you—" cried Lionel.

"White Panther he go from ole brave's house. Never ask this Injun to help again." So saying, the Indian left the room.

"Father," said Lionel, rising to his feet, "do you know what you have done? I am more than astonished at such a proceeding from you, who know so well that had it not been for Panther we should all have been dead ere this. And you sir," turning to the Squire, "you had better never speak of treachery to any one else, you who are treachery itself." So saying, he turned and left the room, followed by the Judge, who felt he had done wrong. In vain did they plead with White Panther

to stay. He would not yield until Lois stepped forward, and kneeling at his feet, begged him for her sake to remain.

Then White Panther, with all the grace of a courtier, raised the maiden and said:

"Me stay for *your* sake, but me pride am hurt by old brave."

They all now returned to the room where the Squire was seated. He turned livid with rage when he saw White Panther enter with the others, but was completely dumbfounded when the Judge, placing his hand on Panther's shoulder, said:

"Remember, sir, this man is my guest, and is to be treated with all respect by everyone under my roof, and the first one who in any manner insults him shall at once be turned from my door."

The Indian gave a satisfied "ugh" and said—

"Me pride well now."

As soon as the Judge ceased speaking, the Squire approached Lionel and said—

"I will trouble you to explain your meaning when you said I was treachery itself."

"You will get no explanation from me; but, if buried logs could speak, they might convince you of my meaning."

"What do you mean, sir, by buried logs? Perhaps you are studying medicine, in the hope of adding M.D. to your name, and have been digging for bones and have been disappointed by finding only logs; or perhaps removing bones you have substituted logs in their place."

"What I know, sir, is no business of yours; but I do know enough to imprison you were we in a city where the law could take its course."

"By heaven, sir, you shall explain, or I'll—"

"Hold, Squire Morton, I beg of you," said the Judge. "My son is excited, and—"

"Not at all, father. I know of what I am speaking. I know more about this man than you, but there is no more to be said. If Squire Morton again insults Panther in any way I will kick him from the door as I would a dog."

Squire Morton had incurred the displeasure of both White Panther and Lionel, and he knew he had been beaten, but there was nothing for him to do if he wished to remain in the block-house but be quiet, nurse his anger, and live in anticipation of a future revenge.

There was in the block house a gushing maiden of about forty

years of age—a school teacher, who had become superannuated in the east, so wended her way west a few months previous, to live with a sister, who was a neighbor to Judge Houghton, and at the Indian scare sought the protection of the Judge in company with their entire family.

This young lady, as she called herself, boasted of the romantic name of Miss Clotilda Maria Haynes, and she had lavished all of her youthful affections on Squire Morton. For him she saved her sweetest looks and brightest smile, and when the Squire was conversing with Lionel she looked at him with eyes that said—

“How sorry I am for you, my heart’s desire, and to think that I must sit silently by and hear you abused so. Oh, it is shameful.”

The Squire was well aware of the penchant this charming creature had for him, and determined to make use of it if possible. A little later the Squire sought out old Pete and said:

“Pete, go and tell that old maid I want to see her.”

“All right, sar.”

“See here, you needn’t tell her that; tell her I am in the garden and want to see her as soon as possible.”

“All right, sar.”

Miss Clotilda was seated in her own room reading when she heard a rap on the door.

“Come in,” she called lazily.

The door was opened and Pete thrust his curly head inside.

“Massa Squire Morton want ter see yer, missis.”

“Good gracious, Pete, are you sure it’s me he wants to see?”

“Yes’m; he say, ‘Pete, tell Miss Clotildy I wants ter see her, and am awaiting her sweet presence in de garden.’”

“Did he say that, Pete?”

“Yes, an’ den—”

“What then?”

“He grab his heart so kind ob tragedy like, an’ roll up his eyes like he was dyin’ or goin’ into a fit, an’ say to hisself—”

“Well, what did he say?”

“Will my heart nebber cease its wild beatin’.”

“How charming! Was that all he said?”

“Yes’m.”

“Tell him my heart responds to his call, and I will be there on the wings of—of—friendship.”

“Yes’m.”

Pete disappeared, and left Miss Clotilda primping before the glass, and saying:

"Can it be he who loves me? I dare not hope. Clotilda, my dear, that curl needs to be re-arranged, and your blue ribbon would make you look younger and more girlish than that you have on. There, that is very graceful and careless. Now I am ready to meet my waiting love in the garden. How fully his poetical nature can appreciate mine! There, I will open this book of poems to that lovely little poem about the maiden and her lover, and take it with me."

Going into the garden she walked up to the Squire, and shook hands with him, saying:

"I received your kind message when I was reading this lovely poem, and had just reached the most interesting place, where Maria in her prison receives a loving message from Augustus, when I received your request. Was it not a strange coincidence?"

"Remarkably so."

"Ah! Squire Morton, I feel very much out of place here in these wilds, and yet I could live here forever and be contented and happy with a sympathetic soul to commune with. I am of a poetical disposition, and often feel I am not appreciated."

"No, it seems very few people *are* appreciated here."

"I understand you, sir! O how my heart bled for you."

"Bled for me?"

"Yes, to see you so misunderstood and your generous and noble spirit not appreciated."

"Miss Haynes, with your noble qualities and your beauty and refinement, I wonder you have not married ere this."

Miss Haynes shook her corkscrew curls saucily and said—

"I must find the right one, and he must be near perfection, before I would leave my girlhood home to become a wife."

"And you have never found him?"

"Oh, Squire Morton!"

"Excuse me, Miss Haynes, I—"

"Don't call me Miss Haynes; it sounds so formal."

"What shall I call you?"

"Clotilda."

"May I indeed claim the privilege of calling you by that sweet name?"

"You may indeed when we are alone."

"But, speaking of your ideal love, have you never yet seen him?"

"I—I—have."

"And yet you have refused him?"

"He has not asked me."

"Who is he?"

"Oh, Squire Morton, do not question me, I beg. I might betray my secret."

"I only wish to know that I may copy his virtues."

"You—you might not have to copy—"

"Clotilda, you sure do not mean that I am so fortunate as to claim you? Can I be so blessed as to—"

Clotilda had laid her head upon his shoulder and thrown one bony arm around his neck, and her watery eyes were looking up shyly into his.

The Squire was in a state of mortal terror lest some one should come along and discover them. Yet he must act his part; it would never do to give it up now, as he wished for a tool among the inmates of the block-house.

"Clotilda, you will keep our engagement a secret for the present?"

"Anything you ask of me, love—"

"You will do anything I ask you! Do you mean it?"

"Can you doubt me?"

"No. Then listen. I would like for you to keep an eye on the three young men and Lois, and report every act and word to me. Will you do so?"

"With pleasure, for am I not serving you?"

"You must be very cautious, and on no account let them suspect they are being watched."

"Trust me for that. Oh, what would I not do for my love? Oh, how extremely happy I am! And now, lest they see us together and suspect our love, I must return to the house."

"Quite right, Clotilda; and don't forget your promise to me."

"I can never forget it. Adieu."

So saying, she departed, waving her large, skinny hand and kissing the tips of her fingers to the Squire, until she disappeared from sight.

"That was a bitter pill," mused the Squire, "but I reckon it was well worth the swallowing for the good it may do me. Ugh! that kiss! I always did hate physic; but the old girl did very well; she was not nearly as gushing as I expected. I wonder if the old fool really thinks I mean business?"

"I believe it would be the very worst punishment that could

possibly be inflicted on me. Just fancy having her hug a man like that more than once a day. I think once a month would kill me if she kept it up for two months; but I must stand it for a while, anyhow. I will keep out of her way all I can, however. Now, Mr. Lionel and Miss Lois, as I have a spy on all of your movements, I may learn something to make you both sorry for your rude treatment of me during the past week. It must be they suspect me of having something to do with the disappearance of Leonora; but of course they can know nothing." So saying, the Squire arose and walked away, and immediately after his disappearance, White Panther glided out from behind a large tree that stood back of the bench on which the loving couple had been seated.

"Me tell young braves, and have lots of fun." Thus musing, White Panther started in quest of Lionel and the other two young men whom he found in the rear of the house, and at once told them all that had passed between the Squire and Clotilda, and told it with so many embellishments that a laugh both loud and long rang out upon the air. That evening the story was repeated to Lois, who laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks.

Notwithstanding their expectations the block house was not attacked that night, and the Squire gave it as his opinion that the Indians had given up the idea for the present at least.

But White Panther kept his own wise counsel and talked very little with any one except his braves, with whom his word was law.

The next morning after Clotilda had been commissioned to watch for the Squire, White Panther wished to leave the block house, but he knew his every movement was observed by the Squire, who supposed he was unobserved, but finally White Panther succeeded in slipping off unnoticed, much to the chagrin of the Squire.

Panther wished to go to his cave and see Jed, and if possible learn the intentions of the Indians. Fortune favored him, and he heard that the block house would receive a visit from Big Owl that very night. As soon as he had received the desired information, Panther hurried to his cave, where he found Jed busily at work cleaning his gun, and who inquired—

"Well, Injun, what's the news?"

"Injuns goin' to fight to-night."

"At the big house?"

"Um, yes."

"By jingo! I don't like playing dead wuth a copper; ef there's a skirmish any whar, I want my finger in ther pie."

"Ole Jed spoil all ef show face now."

"Wal, what ther devil shall I do?"

"Injun make dye and paint face."

"Paint my face?"

"Yes."

"Make an Injun of me?"

"Make look like Injun."

"Wal, in course that's what I meant. 'Tain't likely I want ter turn myself into a redskin for good."

"Oh, Jed! what can I do if you and White Panther both go? I can never stay here alone. I am always in fear of being found. Why can't I go with you?"

"The Squire would know yer."

"I can paint my face with dye."

"But yer clothes?"

"Injun fix dress for young squaw; she shall go."

Panther went into the next room and soon returned with a deer-skin dress, beautifully embroidered with beads of all colors, and a pair of moccasins to match. Going up to Theresa he said:

"Injun paint face; den squaw put on dress, den she be Laughing Eye, squaw of Injun's tribe."

When they were ready to start, Theresa was indeed transformed. Her beautiful hair falling over her shoulders and her black eyes made her look indeed to be a beautiful Indian maiden, and no one would have recognized her as the pale-faced regal beauty, Theresa Morton. As Laughing Eye, she was a success, and would surely pass as such at the block house, where she was introduced as an Indian maiden, and only Lois, Lionel, Arthur and James knew her to be Theresa Morton. Lionel could scarcely keep his eyes off from her, while her conversation was like music to his ears. She was secretly as pleased with him. Squire Morton watched her from the moment she arrived, and said to himself:

"What a beauty she is! By George! I must acquaint myself with her and then woo and win."

He approached her and said—

"The Laughing Eye is well, I trust?"

"Laughing Eye do not know the brave who speaks to her."

"But I would know Laughing Eye."

"The White Panther has commanded me to say nothing to the brave who distrusts him."

"Are you the squaw of Panther?"

"No, I am the squaw of another."

"Why have you come here away from your brave?"

"You must ask Panther if you would know."

"Then you will not answer my questions?"

"No."

"Do you like ornaments like these?" said the Squire, showing her some diamond ear jewels, which Theresa recognized as hers.

"They shine like the stars."

"If you will answer my questions they shall be yours."

"They are like the stars, but Laughing Eye has some much brighter and will not disobey her chief for those."

"Very well; as I cannot persuade you, I must find out what I wish to know some other way."

So saying, he left her alone, and soon Panther joined her, and to him she repeated the conversation with the Squire.

"Laughing Eye has acted wisely, and White Panther will protect her from that brave."

Clotilda met the Squire, and was gotten up for the occasion in a dress of pink, which Lois thought was too nearly the color of her hair to be becoming.

"Dearest, I have something to tell you."

"Something to tell me, Clotilda, dear?"

"Yes, I listened, or tried to, to a conversation between Lois Houghton and that Indian girl with the mop of black hair."

"What did they say?"

"I only heard her say Squire Morton, and then Lois said something about Clotilda and they laughed. I presume she is jealous, because she is so dark and homely."

"Go, Clotilda, and find out all you can. You will have ample chance to-night, no doubt."

And then the two separated, each going their own way.

There was a fierce attack made on the block house at about midnight, and was more determined than on the former occasion. Our friends fought nobly and worked hard putting out the fires on the roof, which caught several times from brands fired there by arrows. The women helped, shrinking from no danger, except Clotilda who, as she expressed it, "was a timid,

shrinking creature from a child;" but she stayed about and managed to drink her share of hot coffee prepared for the men, who were everywhere and in all places at the same time.

CHAPTER X.

At last the enemy were again vanquished, and our friends began to feel that they could breathe again, when suddenly a new fear seized upon them. Lois and Laughing Eye were nowhere to be found. The Judge was nearly wild with grief; when he found both daughters gone, he refused to be comforted. Lionel was enraged, and boldly declared—

"There is a traitor here, and let him beware, for I know who he is, and will yet declare his name to all present."

James Carlton went about in a dejected way, as if he had no hope of ever seeing Lois again.

"Come, man, cheer up," said Lionel; "you are only bearing the pain that Arthur has so long and so bravely borne. We will soon have Lois and Leonora back with us, and then let that villain beware, for I am afraid I shall kill him."

When Squire Morton was told by Clotilda that Lois was gone his face lighted up with a triumphant smile; but when told that Laughing Eye had disappeared, he did not seem so well pleased, and said to himself—

"Why did they take her, I wonder? Perhaps Big Owl wants her for his squaw. I am sorry, for I meant she should be mine, without priest or parson, but I can afford to lose her, as I have only one month to wait before the beautiful Leonora will voluntarily become mine. After declaring I would only wait a week, I have good-naturedly given her a month, but what difference can it make—she is surely mine. No one knows where she is. How I will crow over that impudent puppy, Lionel; how it will cut him when he sees his sister an unhappy bride, united to the man she abhors above all men on this earth. He suspects me, but what of that? his suspicion amounts to nothing."

"I fancy I have lost some of my influence over the old man, but I guess the mortgage business will fix him all right. How I wish that old maid would keep away from me; she disgusts me. If all women were like her I would never abduct one; but how her hideousness sets off the beauty of Leonora. Well, as all the rest have retired for the night, I guess I will do the same, for I wish to rise early and pay my future wife a visit."

It was nearly daylight when Jed, in his disguise, stealthily left the house and went toward the Squire's, saying to himself:

"I'se get ter do it, kase I promised Miss Leny I'd come an' find out what that pestiferous old beast said about givin' her a month's time."

Arrived at her window, he again called her name as on his previous visit. He had spoken but once, when he heard a cry of joy, and then Leonora at the window exclaimed:

"Oh, Jed, is it you?"

"Yes, Miss Leny."

"Thank God! I was afraid you would not come."

Jed then related to her the attack on the block house, but refrained from saying anything of the loss of her sister, thinking she had all the burden she could carry.

"Wal, Miss Leny, what did the Squire say to yer proposal to wait a month?"

"He agreed to it, but said he would not wait a day longer."

"Wal, we won't ask him to."

"Jed, will you not soon get me out of this place?"

"Yes."

"How soon?"

"That I can't say, Miss Leny, but yer see he keeps so many darned niggers and white devils, too, around this place, we hev to be mighty careful."

"I will try to be patient, but, oh, how my heart calls for my home and friends."

"Miss Leny, would yer like ter talk with Mr. Arthur?"

"Oh, Jed, do not raise hopes that you cannot gratify."

"I don't know nothing about that, but I thought perhaps yer might like ter see him, and—"

"Oh, Jed, if I could, I should be almost happy."

"Wal, yer shall ef I can manage it, and I'll try my darndest, only don't get impatient waitin' ter git out, kase we'll get yer out jest as quick as we can."

"I know you will, Jed, and I am foolish to feel impatient and forsaken as I sometimes do, but I will try to banish all such feelings."

"That's right, Miss Leny, and now I'll hev ter go, because the sun'll rise soon and they must not miss me at the block-house. I don't know how soon I kin come, but the next time I do appear, I'll have Mister Arthur with me. Now good-bye, and don't git blue."

After Jed left her, Leonora threw herself upon her couch and slept sweetly until morn.

Laughing Eye had not been abducted, as the Squire and all the rest supposed. During the fight everything had been confusion, and she and Lois had been inside and outside of the house waiting upon the men and cheering them with their presence. She was standing near Lois, herself unobserved, when she saw Squire Morton steal up behind her and quickly tie a handkerchief over her mouth, and pinion her arms and hurry her to a gate near the river, where he acted as guard. Arriving at the gate a moment after him, she saw him give the insensible form of Lois into the arms of two white villains.

Resolving to save her friend if possible, Laughing Eye glided through the gate and followed them. When they had gone a short distance from the block-house they halted and bound Lois to a board covered with a bearskin.

Laughing Eye concealed herself where she could see their every movement. A little after daylight she heard one of the men say—

“Jack, you stay here and watch the gal. I’m going to see what I can shoot for breakfast.”

So saying he left his mate with Lois and entered the woods still deeper.

Laughing Eye waited until she thought the man was far enough away. She then quietly crept up behind Jack and coughed to attract his attention. Turning suddenly around he felt the muzzle of a revolver strike his head.

Pointing to Lois, Laughing Eye said, “Cut bonds.”

The poor wretch did not dare disobey, and stepped forward to do her bidding, she following, never removing the revolver from his head. When Lois was free and the gag removed from her mouth, Laughing Eye said—

“Give rope to Laughing Eye.”

Jack put his hand in his bootleg and drew out a long rope.

“Stand back to tree,” said Laughing Eye. Then handing the rope to Lois, she told her to bind him, after which she gave the revolver to Lois and said—

“Hold the brave’s head while Laughing Eye fasten thongs herself.”

After assuring herself that he was securely bound, Laughing took the revolver and said to Lois—

“Come with me, white squaw.”

On the way to the house she instructed Lois to answer no questions until she had a chance to tell her brother.

That morning the breakfast party at the block house was a sad one, for all missed the bright face of gay and happy Lois, who was the life of the house, her good nature and sparkling wit cheering them as nothing else could since the abduction of Leonora.

Poor Hortense was nearly heart-broken, for she was all the mother the girls had ever known. There had been scarcely a word spoken, and each one strove to appear calm and attempted to partake of the food, but it was a failure, until the door suddenly opened, and Laughing Eye and Lois coolly entered, and, after the customary "good morning" from Lois, they sat down to the table.

To describe the expressions on the different faces would be impossible. The Squire half arose from his chair, his face ashy pale. The Judge choked himself with hot tea, to excuse his watery eyes. Aunt Hortense burst into tears. James Carlton clasped her in his arms, while Lionel shouted three cheers and a tiger. Clotilda gushingly clasped the neck of Hortense in a vise-like manner, and began kissing her. Then as each one found the power of speech restored, they all asked questions at the same moment.

"Where have you been?"

"When did you return?"

"Who took you away?"

"Who rescued you?"

"Did the Indians hurt you?"

"Are you not hungry?"

"Do you feel faint?"

"Did they take you far?"

"Have you seen Leonora?"

As soon as Lois could speak, she said: "You have all asked questions at once, so I will give one answer to all, 'No matter.'"

"Do give her a chance to breathe," said Lionel. "Don't you see that she is all tired out? Come, my darling little sister, eat a good hearty breakfast, and no one shall ask you a question for three minutes."

In vain they questioned Laughing Eye. They could get no satisfaction from her, and at last gave it up.

After breakfast Laughing Eye sought the three young men,

together with Jed and White Panther, and told them the manner of Lois' abduction and the way her escape was effected. They could not find words to express their admiration of her noble daring, and her image was the more deeply engraved upon the susceptible heart of Lionel.

CHAPTER XI.

Squire Morton was very angry at seeing Lois so composedly take her seat at the table, and very much annoyed at not being able to find out how she had escaped. He wished he *knew* whether she had any knowledge of who it was that crept up behind her; but of course it could not be or she would have denounced him at once as a villain.

"I wonder," said he to himself, "I wonder if Jack and Bill will wait for me now that they have lost the girl. I must see them and find out about this affair. It seems as if the devil and all his minions are leagued against me, instead of trying to help his own. I will see Clotilda and tell her to keep a strict watch and find out all she can, and then I will see Bill and Jack."

He sent for Clotilda to meet him in the garden, and when she came he said—

"Clotilda, my dear, I wish you to watch carefully everything that goes on, and find out all about how those girls escaped. Will you do so?"

"Light of my life, I will do my utmost to obtain the desired information."

"That is right, and when I return I will bring you an engagement ring."

"When will my darling return?"

"That I cannot tell. I may get back to-day."

Clotilda soon left her lover and entered the house to dream of the promised ring, which the Squire had told her should be a diamond of the first water, as no other gem was fit to grace the beautiful hand of his peerless Clotilda, and in return for which she must be a good girl and watch for him and find out all she could.

Jack particularly disliked to injure a female, and had remonstrated against abducting Lois, but finally his objections were overruled by the ridicule of Bill, as was usually the case; but when he found himself bound to a tree and his fair prisoner making her way towards her friends, he was not sorry, and waited patiently for the return of Bill. He had not long to

wait, for while musing seriously in regard to his past life, he was startled by the exclamation—

“The devil!”

“Where?”

“I suppose if the whole block-house had been down upon you you wouldn’t have known it, would you?”

“No.”

“What the devil does this mean?”

“What does what mean?”

“Are you a fool? Where’s the gal?”

“Gone.”

“Gone where?”

“Escaped!”

“Escaped?”

“Yas; that’s what I said.”

“How did it happen?”

“An Injin gal followed her, an’ after yer had gone for some time I hearn a cough right behind me, an’ turned round quicker than a flash ter see who ’twas, an’ she had a pistol right close ter my head; then she made me let the other gal loose an’ give her a rope an’ she bound me; then they went off. There, that’s ail.”

“All! a pretty mess you’ve made, haven’t you; what’ll we tell the Squire?”

“Run away an’ not wait for him?”

“No, that won’t do; we’ll hev ter wait till he comes, an’ jest tell him all about it.”

“Wal, we’ll stay an’ tell him, then.”

“Easy enough ter talk, but do you want ter see him?”

“Oh, no, you may do that.”

“No, I’m blessed ef I will. Fancy the row he’ll kick up. What in the devil did yer let her go for?”

“Do yer ’s’pose I wanted ter be shot?”

“No, yer blarsted coward, I don’t.”

“P’raps, then, brave man, you’d like ter be?”

“Hold on! put up that shooter, Jack.”

“Wal, sit down then, and be quiet till the Squire comes, and don’t be calling yer betters cowards.”

At last the Squire arrived, and to him they told the way in which Lois had been taken from them.

“Then Laughing Eyes followed and released her?”

“Yes.”

“Of course then she knows that I stole her?”

"I s'pose so."

"It will not do for me to go to the block house again."

"Why not, Squire?"

"Why not? Because Laughing Eyes has of course told them of the way in which I stole Lois."

"Wall, can't yer say it's a durned lie that White Panther got up 'cause he hates yer?"

"Yes, Bill, I *can* do that; and if I am accused that's just what I will say."

The three then proceeded to the home of the Squire, where Bill and Jack were treated to strong brandy, pipes and tobacco.

The Squire sought Leonora as soon as he could leave the two worthies alone.

"Ah, Leonora, have you no greeting for me?"

"No; and please call me by my proper name—Miss Houghton."

"Why need you care, when you are so soon to become Mrs Morton, or—"

"Until that time comes, please call me Miss Houghton."

"Which I prefer not to do, as I like Leonora better."

"That name is for my friends to speak."

"And am I not your friend?"

"No, you are anything but my friend."

"I am disposed to be friendly towards you, Miss Houghton. How can it be otherwise since I intend to make you my wife?"

"Squire Morton, I detest you!"

"Miss Houghton, I adore you."

"I wish you would leave me."

"You are cruel, but if you command it of course I must obey. Now adieu," and bowing low in mock humility and reverence, he left the room. After he had gone, Leonora espied a letter upon the floor which she picked up and read, thinking it might aid her in some way. The letter was as follows:

MY DEAR SON—Since you married our dear daughter and carried her so far away from us, my health has been steadily and surely failing. Of course you know that the most of the property which you supposed was mine belonged to Theresa, she having inherited it from a distant relative, and at her marriage went with her into your hands. I am unable to transact business now, and an unfortunate speculation has left me destitute. I care not for myself, but my wife, poor old lady, suffers

for the necessaries of life. Can you not help us—we are poor and needy. May God bless you, my son, is the prayer of

THOMAS HARTFORD,
St. Louis, Mo.

The letter bore the date of two years previous, and when Leonora had finished reading her eyes were filled with tears of pity for the poor old people.

How had the villain answered it, or had he not answered at all? She determined to keep the letter, and when Jed came again give it to him through her prison bars, and ask him to deliver it to Theresa.

The many defeats that Big Owl had experienced convinced him that it would be better for him to be on friendly terms with the whites. So on the afternoon of the day on which Lois returned he approached the block-house, holding a blanket in the air as a flag of truce. He was admitted, and he and the Judge smoked the pipe of peace. At dusk he departed, laden with beads, food, pipes and tobacco, perfectly happy with the peace offerings given him at Judge Houghton's.

He had not been gone many minutes when Squire Morton made his appearance, and seeking Clotilda, placed a very small diamond upon her finger, after which he asked her for any news she might have to tell him.

He was much annoyed that Big Owl had become friendly with the Judge, but was rejoiced that it had not occurred sooner.

"Did the Judge accuse him of having his daughter a prisoner?" asked the Squire.

"Yes, but he said that Two-Snakes-in-the-Grass had taken her away when she tried to escape from an old Indian woman; but he said he would find her and restore her to him."

"And he believed it?"

"Yes, his son told him it was true; he said she had been confined in the hut of a man named Bill Higgins, but that when White Panther went after her she was gone."

"You learned nothing more?"

"Only that White Panther and his braves will remain here for a while."

"How long?"

"I can't find out."

"You have not heard how the girls got away?"

"No; they will answer no questions. The Judge asked Big

Owl why he took Lois away, and he said he did not, and knew nothing about it."

"Very good. Now, dear Clotilda, be as watchful as ever. If it was needful for me, you would stoop to the meanness of listening at keyholes, wouldn't you?"

"Anything to please you, my own true love."

CHAPTER XII.

The next night after Jed's interview with Leonora, he drew Arthur to one side, and said—

"Youngster, would yer like ter speak with Miss Leny?"

"Oh, Jed, don't torture me."

"Wal, I swar ef I'd a thought it would be torture fur yer ter speak ter Miss Leny, I wouldn't have sed a word; but I thought you'd go through tophet fur the sake of the dear girl."

"And so I would, Jed. You know what I mean."

"I s'pose yer mean what yer say."

"See here, Jed. Do you know where she is, and is it possible for me to see and speak to her?"

"Hold on, youngster; not too many questions at a time. As ter seein', can't say; as ter speakin', I reckon we can arrange that are."

"Come, then, take me to her at once."

"Hold on, yer blarsted little fool! Der yer think yer kin run right inter her arms this blessed minute?"

"Why need we delay?"

"Look here, youngster, this is a dangerous business, an' we've got ter go slow. We must wait till it is darker, an' sneak out without lettin' anyone see us; so wait a spell."

"Jed," said Arthur, grasping his hand, "you are a noble fellow, and—

"Thunder and lightning, who said I warnt?" growled Jed. "Don't let any one see you shakin' my fist like that. Go away now, and pay as little attention ter me as yer kin. When I'm ready, I'll come after yer."

Oh, how long the time seemed to the impatient lover; but finally Jed came to him and uttered the one word "Come," and they silently left the block-house.

When they reached the Squire's dwelling Jed said—

"I'll keep watch here, while you go up to that window there and speak to her."

Arthur hastened to the window designated and softly called "Leonora."

A glad cry of "it is Arthur" greeted his ears.

"Yes, my darling, I have come to you."

They talked for a long time, but we will forbear repeating it. At last Leonora said—

"Here is a letter which the Squire must have lost, as I found it upon the floor. I wish you would give it to Theresa, as it concerns those dear to her."

Arthur took the letter and said: "Now, dearest, I will bid you good night, but will come again very soon to talk with you. We are every day getting evidence against the Squire, and will soon land him where he belongs. He thinks we are all ignorant of his past history, but let him beware and tremble."

So saying he tenderly kissed the little hand thrust through the bars, and joining Jed, they started for home. On the way they heard voices, and listening they heard the Squire say—

"Clotilda, the old maid schoolma'am, told me he went out with an Indian, but I was too late to follow them."

"We haven't seen nothing of them, Squire."

"What he can be doing at this time of night in the woods I can't understand. Confound the old maid, why didn't she tell me sooner?"

"P'raps she had to stop to put on her wig and git her teeth."

Jed whispered to Arthur and said—

"That old peacock of a Clotildy ought to be turned out of the block house."

"Yes, she is a spy upon us all, and may do her much harm."

"By gosh! I'll see Miss Lois and fix things so that the old fool will find out that the Squire ain't loyal to her."

"Just the thing, Jed, and we'll have lots of fun out of it."

When they arrived at the block house they were met by Pete, who exclaimed hastily—

"Massa Arthur, Squire Morton he done gone out jes' a little while ago, an' jes' 'fore he go ole Injin woman came and rapped at de gate. De guard wasn't goin' fur ter let her in when Squire done say, 'Yes, let her in, Ben; she be ole Injin woman an' heap friendly. She only wants rest fur de night.' Den he turn to walk off, an' she come 'long and say 'Injin tank.' Den I seen him eye look like debbil, an' I hear 'im call her White-Wash, an' say to her, 'Did you bring de drugs?' and she say 'Yes.' Dey no see dis nigger. but he see dem an' hear Squire

say, 'Arthur, I'll show 'm to yer in de mornin'.' I t'ink, sar, de debbil am to pay."

"Thank you, Pete," said Arthur. "You have warned us of a great danger, and I will remember you."

They now sought White Panther, whom they found rolled in his blanket and asleep. Jed woke him and inquired—

"Panther, seen any old squaw come in camp?"

"Injin he see."

"Who was it?"

"It be Quitewah."

"That old hag!"

Jed then told White Panther what the negro had seen and heard, and White Panther said—

"Young Arthur brave must be careful not to eat or drink anyt'ing 'cept what white folks give him. Injin he watch ole squaw an' see what she try do."

Jed and Arthur then went to bed and left White Panther to again roll himself in his blanket. The Squire returned at daylight, and after breakfast Arthur saw him talking to Quitewah and pointing toward him.

Old Quitewah kept herself busy all the forenoon telling the fortunes of the young people. When she came to Arthur she said—

"Be good many lines in brave's hand."

"Well?"

"Quitewah see."

"What?"

"Quitewah no tell, see heap bad luck."

"Go on and tell what you pretend to see!"

"Quitewah see brave love, young squaw, big much—"

"Go on."

"No, have see her for good long time. She tink one time she love brave, but she love nudder brave now. Quitewah see pretty soon she marry uder brave, an' den you no care what come. So pretty soon you go to happy hunting-ground; den I see little boy pappoose named for young brave."

"It is pleasant to know that my name will live after I am dead," said Arthur, laughingly.

Quitewah now turned away from Arthur to Lois, to whom she predicted a happy future. All that day, wherever he was, Arthur saw Quitewah not far from him. It was very annoying,

and when Laughing Eye came to talk with him he went to Quitewah and said :

“Quitewah, I want you to go off and not follow me around any more to-day.”

The old hag left him muttering in the Indian tongue, while Arthur returned to Theresa or Laughing Eye, who showed him the letter he had brought her from Leonora. After he had perused it, Theresa said :

“I must now make myself known and claim my property, for as you see by that letter my parents are suffering.”

“Not so,” said Arthur, “for that would ruin all our plans. I will, if you will permit me, loan you whatever sum you may want, but you must wait a little longer before claiming your own. We will call Lionel, Lois, Panther and Jed, and see what is the best course to pursue.”

Quitewah had gone directly to the Squire and reported how she had been sent off by Arthur; and a little later, seeing White Panther, another Indian, who was Jed, Lionel, Lois, Arthur and Laughing Eye in conversation, he walked leisurely over to them as if to join the group. Then Lionel said to him :

“Squire Morton, we are engaged in a little private conversation, and if you will be so kind as to leave us and keep Clotilda, old Quitewah and all the rest of your spies away from us, we will thank you.”

The Squire turned on his heel and walked away, literally foaming at the mouth.

The conclave of friends decided that Theresa should start for St. Louis, accompanied by Jed. They were to go that night secretly to the cave, where they would exchange their disguises for their proper clothing, and then make their way as quickly as possible to St. Louis.

Arthur cautioned Theresa to let no one in the city see her to recognize her; he advised her to always wear a veil when in the street for fear that the Squire might find out she was there, as a part of the friends' plan was for the Squire to visit St. Louis soon, and as he had lived there some time before his marriage, he and Theresa had many mutual friends in the city who would of course like to be the first to inform the Squire that his wife was still alive.

“But how are you going to send the Squire to St. Louis?” asked Theresa.

"Oh, we have that all arranged, and when you see how it works you will say it is a capital plan."

That night Jed and Theresa started for the cave, which they reached near morning. They decided that the best thing they could do with the rest of that day was to rest, which they did, and at night they started on their long and tedious journey.

Theresa was brave and very little drawback to Jed. When they arrived in St. Louis they procured some new clothing and a thick veil for Theresa, which she wore whenever she was in the street. Procuring a carriage they started out to find her father and mother. To her surprise, she did not find them where she had left them, in a neat cottage in an aristocratic street, but in a hovel in one of the lowest localities in the city. It was a long time before she could find them; but when she did, and saw the poverty they were reduced to through the machinations of the man she had a few years ago promised to love, honor and obey, she cursed him in her heart.

Calling her father into a room alone, they made known to him as gently as possible that his beloved and only child was indeed alive, and the news of her death a hoax.

"Your mother is very feeble, but joy never kills, so let us at once break the good news to her."

"Let us do so, dear father; but we will be very careful of my dear mother," said Theresa.

She found her mother lying upon a bed, looking very ill, and as if life held nothing for her. After talking to her a few moments, she said:

"Would you like some news from your daughter?"

"My dear daughter is dead," she replied sadly.

"But she were not really dead—"

"What do you mean?"

"Supposing she were alive, would you wish to see her?"

"I don't know what you mean, but you cause a strange feeling in my heart. If my darling Theresa were alive she would surely come to me."

"*Mother, look at me. I am Theresa.*"

The old lady gazed a moment into the face bent over her, and then without a word she wound her poor old bony arms around her child's neck and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XIII.

Theresa wished to remove her parents into a better locality, and with the aid of Jed this was soon accomplished. Going to a very smart and noted lawyer, Theresa explained her case and revealed all the villany of the Squire. She engaged him for her counsel, and he promised her that when everything was ready the Squire would find the hand of the law heavy, and to himself he felt convinced it would bring fame, for it would be a noted case.

Theresa attended to all the business required, aided by Jed and then she advised him to make his way back to the block-house and inform their friends of their safe arrival at St. Louis, the deplorable condition in which her beloved parents were found, and the opinion of her counsel in relation to Squire Morton.

Jed agreed with her, and so after remaining a week in the city pining for the forest and backwood excitements, he bade Theresa good-bye, and turned his face towards the dearest spot on earth to him—the wild woods.

The night that Theresa and Jed left the block-house, found Arthur at Leonora's window. Let us listen to their conversation.

"Leonora, dearest, I wish you to aid us in a plan to bring the Squire to justice."

"I will gladly do anything in my power to punish the vile miscreant."

"I do not doubt it; but it will need a good deal of nerve on your part, and you must have full confidence in us."

"You surely do not doubt my confidence in you?"

"No; but listen to our scheme. You are to tell the Squire that you cannot bear to be caged up here any longer; that you wish him to take you to St. Louis, where you can at least have sunshine and air. That, if nothing happens at the end of the agreed time, you will marry him; but that you wish to be married in the style befitting his position. The reason you wish to go to St. Louis is you do not wish to meet Arthur and listen to his upbraidings. That you freely and cheerfully promise him not to try to escape, and will hold no communication with a single person who is the least objectionable to him. Leonora, can you, will you do this?"

"Yes, dear Arthur; but you mean to rescue me on the way, do you not?"

"No, darling. Now comes the hardest part of your trial. You must go to the altar with him."

"Oh, Arthur!"

"We will forbid the banns, or rather Theresa will."

"It shall be as you say, Arthur. I can and will play my part."

"Spoken like my own brave Leonora. Be of good cheer, darling, and you shall witness the downfall of the Squire and the restitution to the poor, persecuted Theresa of her rights."

"But, Arthur, what if your plans should fail, after all, and that man should make me—I cannot say it?"

"I can well understand your fears, darling; but he shall *never* make you his wife. I would die if necessary to prevent it. Besides, you forget that Theresa will be in St. Louis on the watch to prevent anything like failure."

"Then she will really start to-night?"

"Yes; she has already started, but will go no farther than White Panther's cave to-night."

"God grant her a safe and speedy journey."

"Amen. But I have no fears, for she is accompanied by our faithful Jed, who has been many times to the city to dispose of skins."

"I know she will be safe with him. What a noble fellow he is! He hates the city, yet is willing to endure its noise and bustle for an indefinite length of time so that right may prevail."

"Theresa appears to be a fine woman?"

"That she is, and they tell me she is beautiful."

"What a pity that she fell into the power of so vile a man; but it may be that she will yet meet one worthy of her, if she has not already."

"What? Where has she met any one?"

"At the block-house."

"Who is he, tell me?"

"A certain Lionel, I suspicion, feels very tenderly towards her."

"My brother Lionel?"

"Even so."

"But Lionel must not think too much of her, for while the Squire lives they cannot be any more than strangers to each other."

"But Theresa could easily obtain a divorce."

"True; yet I know she would never consider herself free to marry another unless the Squire was dead."

"Well, if Lionel loves her, he cannot help it."

"No; but still for his sake, also her's, I hope he does not; but, Arthur, what about old Quitewah?"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"You say she is still at the block-house?"

"Yes."

"You must look out for her."

"Do you think I fear that old hag?"

"No, not if she would openly declare herself your enemy; but she will try strategy."

"She will find she has got the wrong man."

"Still you will promise to be careful?"

"Yes."

After more promises of constancy and undying love, they parted, Arthur to return to the block-house, and Leonora to fall asleep and dream of the downfall of the Squire. She did not awake until aroused by the old negress who came to bring her her breakfast and tell her that she "done look mighty smil-in' dis mornin'."

On the same morning the Squire determined to seek out Laughing Eye, and try to converse with her, and, if possible, hire her not to tell of the way he had abducted Lois, which he felt sure she must know.

Upon inquiring, he learned that no one had seen her since the night before. Feeling very anxious, he resolved to ask White Panther.

"I do not see the Laughing Eye?"

"Neither do Injun."

"Has she left the block-house?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where she has gone?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Injun guess she gone to join her tribe."

"Where are they?"

"Way up near the big lakes."

"Then how happens she to be with your tribe?"

"She be squaw of one of my braves."

"Why has she left him?"

"He been killed."

The Squire turned away, a look of dissatisfaction on his countenance and muttered—

"If she has gone to the lakes away off in Michigan, possibly in Canada, she can do me no harm. I only hope she has not told Lois. I will pump her by and by and see what I can find out."

White Panther had not lied. There was an Indian girl of the name of Laughing Eye who belonged to a tribe of Indians near the great lakes. She had married one of the braves of his tribe who had been accidentally killed a short time before while out hunting. After the death of her brave she had returned to her own tribe, and was living with them as before her marriage.

She was the daughter of a chief, and very beautiful, and when Theresa's skin had been stained she somewhat resembled Laughing Eye. Thus it had occurred to White Panther to give her that name.

The Squire found Lois sitting in the porch, in the negro quarters, and bowing politely to her he said—

"Miss Lois, you have not yet told me how you escaped from the Indians."

"Indians! I did not escape from the Indians."

"Who then took you from us?"

"Two white men whom I never saw before?"

"Two white men. Is it possible?"

"Yes, there must have been three of them, for one carried me from the inside of the inclosure, and gave me to the two from whom I escaped."

"How could he have got inside?"

"That is a mystery which puzzles us all."

"But was not Laughing Eye abducted at the same time you was?"

"Laughing Eye was not abducted."

"What then was the cause of her disappearance?"

"She saw me carried off and followed me."

"And then rescued you?"

"Yes."

"A very brave woman. But did she not recognize the one who gave you to the others?"

"She refuses to say anything about that."

"Perhaps there was a traitor among the Indians whom she did not wish to betray?"

"It may be."

"When are the Indians going away?"

"Probably at nightfall, but White Panther will remain for a while in hopes of learning something of Jed."

"Why, he is dead."

"So it is reported, but White Panther was much attached to him, and of course hopes against hope."

"I thought Indians had more sense than that."

"But White Panther is not an Indian."

"Not an Indian? What is he, then?"

"A white man, who was given years ago when a child to the Indians by a dying villain named Henderson."

"Bill Henderson?"

"Yes, but how did you know?"

"I was once acquainted with him. Did the child belong to him?"

"No; he was placed under the care of an old Indian woman, to whom Henderson confided the secret of the child's berth."

"And she alone knows who he is?"

"Yes."

The Squire seemed agitated and at once left Lois, who at once started in quest of White Panther, to whom she told how the Squire acted when he heard the story of White Panther's birth. At the close she said:

"I guess the story was a home-thrust of some kind, or the Squire would never have shown such agitation."

CHAPTER XIV.

Squire Morton, when he left Lois, seemed to be in a very ill humor. "Curse the luck," he muttered, "I am thwarted at every turn. That devilish Indian, White Panther, must put me in terror and make me nearly betray myself to Lois. But he surely can't know who I am, or he would have slit my windpipe and taken my scalp long before this. But the devil of it is he *may* find out, and then good bye to the fortune that I obtained so easily and have so long looked upon as mine. I could never live in poverty again, having so long been accustomed to having the means of gratifying my wishes. The fortune that belonged to Theresa I should soon run through with after I leave this forest and go to the city. I would be insufficient to support me in the style in which I wish to live.

"Leonora, after she marries me, will probably be glad enough to get as far away from here as possible, and that will just suit me to a T. We will go to Europe, and once away from here with the money, I shall be safe. What if Bill Henderson's confession be a written one? But Lois said he told the old woman on his death-bed, so of course I am all safe there. Well. I see nothing now in the way of my future happiness. Leonora will soon be my bride, and we will go abroad, and when I tire of her it will be easy enough to dispose of her and choose another. I guess I will visit her this morning and see what kind of a mood she is in."

Having mused himself into good humor, he started off in the direction of his house.

Leonora was thinking of what Arthur had said to her the night before, and wondering how she should broach the subject to the Squire, when she heard him coming.

"I am glad you have come," said she, "as I have a request to make of you."

"I am only too happy to grant any request of Miss Houghton's if it is possible. Speak on, dear one."

"Spare your compliments for those who want and appreciate them and listen to me."

"I am all attention and curiosity."

"How can you marry me when Theresa is alive?"

"Theresa is dead."

"What?"

"Theresa is dead."

"How do you know?"

"Some friends of mine found her dead; besides, if she had escape alive do you not think you would have been taken from here long before this?"

"True. Poor Theresa, and your conscience does not reproach you?"

"No; why should it?"

"Because you have killed her."

"Oh, no; if she had remained here she would be alive now."

"But her imprisonment was to her worse than death."

"She had her choice and—"

"Made a very sensible one."

"Thank you."

"You are quite welcome, sir. Squire Morton, this imprisonment is killing me. Why can you not take me away to some

city, St. Louis, for instance, where I may have a little more freedom. When the month is up, if my friends are still silent I will fulfill my promise in any church before as many of your friends as will attend."

"Possibly you think that in St. Louis you may escape and make your way to friends?"

"You are mistaken; if my friends care not enough for me to search for and rescue me, I shall not seek them. I will make no attempt to escape."

After thinking for a moment the Squire said:

"It shall be as you wish, and we will start to-morrow, as it is a long and difficult journey; and remember I have your promise to make me no trouble."

He left her, and Leonora said to herself:

"Start to-morrow! I did not think it would be so soon. Oh if Arthur does not come; but he must."

And he did come that night, and to him she told what the Squire had said.

"Be brave, my precious darling. The ceremony shall be performed, but with a change of bridegrooms," and thus they parted, each bidding the other God speed.

One day Lionel shouldered his gun and went into the woods after game. He shot a fine large deer, and went up to it and was about to take possession of it when Bill Higgins stepped out from a clump of bushes and said to him:

"Look a here, youngster, that's my meat."

"How came it yours when I shot it?"

"Don't make no difference, it's mine, an I'm goin' ter hev it."

"I guess not."

"I guess yes."

"Then you'll have to fight for it."

"I'll back him," said another, stepping from another clump of bushes.

"Oh, you are going to try two against one, are you?"

"That's it precisely."

"If you want game, there's plenty in these woods. Why don't you shoot it?"

"Oh, we're too tired."

"Yes, we has ter let the young men do it for us."

"Well, this young man only shoots for himself, and you can't have this deer."

"Oh, yes, we can," said they, making a rush at him.

"Oh, no, yer can't, yer pestiferous thieves," said a voice, and the next moment they were lying on the ground.

"Jed, in the name of all that's wonderful, where did you come from?"

"Behind that big tree yonder." So saying he helped the two men to their feet, and holding a revolver in his hand, and grasping the collar of Bill he bade Lionel serve Jack the same way.

"Come on now, you sneaking cowards! You've stole the last gal you will, I'll bet. Here, don't try to get away, or I'll shoot."

At the mention of stealing girls the men began to tremble, but thought they had rather be led away than shot, so quietly submitted to the inevitable.

After Squire Morton left for St. Louis, the Judge was informed of all his villany and the reason of his sudden departure. The old Judge was like a madman in his anger, but when he learned of their plans to give him his just deserts, he entered heartily into them.

"Why did you not tell me before that it was he who robbed me of my darling Leonora?" he asked.

"Because," replied Lionel, "you would not have believed it if we had told you a week ago."

"No, I should not, for he completely deceived me. He appeared as anxious about Leonora as I did myself."

"Yes, Judge," said Jed. "I reckon ther Squire completely blumfuddicated you."

"Why didn't you tell me, Jed, where Leonora was?"

"Kase ye'd a spilt everything by kickin' up a muss an' goin' after her, an' yer wouldn't a got 'er if yer hed; then he'd a taken her away an' nobody could a found her."

"You are right, Jed; I'm an old fool."

They were well on their way when one night, much to their surprise, White Panther walked into their camp.

"Why, where in the world did you come from?" asked the Judge.

"Wal I swar, Injin, how came yer here?"

"Panther, where are you going?"

"Big camp."

"St. Louis?"

"Um, yes."

"What fur, Injin?"

"Goin' to big council—make Squire be shut up."

"Goin' to court?"

"Ugh!"

CHAPTER XIV.

When Leonora arrived at St. Louis she, with the old negress, was placed in a carriage and taken to a hotel. There she was kept in her room, her food being brought to her, so that she was as much a prisoner as in the Squire's mansion. The following day the Squire proposed to take her for a ride, but she refused to go.

"How, then," he asked, "are you benefited by the sun and air in coming to the city?"

"My window," said she, "is not a cellar window; it is large enough when raised to admit the air, and when I look towards it my eyes do not rest upon those iron bars."

Theresa was one day out doing some shopping, but was as usual closely veiled. She was returning home, walking briskly, when she saw Squire Morton ahead of her. She followed him around from place to place, until at last she saw him enter a hotel.

"He is staying here, of course," said she. "What has become of poor Leonora? Can he have brought her here? I will find out."

She stepped up to the clerk and asked:

"Is that gentleman alone here?"

"No, madam; he has with him a young lady and negress."

"And his name is," and she gave a fictitious name, so that if the clerk should tell the Squire of her inquiries he would not suspect.

"No, his name is Morton."

"I must have made a mistake, good-morning,"

She left the hotel, but had not gone far when she met Arthur. He was disguised, but still she recognized him, and going up to him cautiously spoke his name.

He started and quickly said—

"You must be mistaken; I do not know you."

"Oh, yes, you do," said she, throwing back her veil.

"It is you who are mistaken, for I certainly never saw you before."

"Have you so soon forgotten Laughing Eye?"

"Are you indeed Laughing Eye?"

"Yes, I was for a short time known by that name. I am really Theresa Morton."

"I am more than glad to see you. But did you see the Squire enter that hotel yonder?"

"Yes; I have but just come from there."

"He did not know it?"

"No. I followed him in. But you have not yet explained to me why you are here alone?"

"I am not alone."

"Who, then, came with you?"

"Lionel, James, Lois, the Judge, Jed and White Panther, and last, but not least for use, are Bill and Jack, two of the Squire's hirelings."

"Those who took Leonora from the old Indian woman?"

"The same."

"Why are they here with you?"

"To testify against the Squire."

He then told Theresa of the manner in which they were captured, and why they were friendly and ready and willing to serve the Judge, after which he said—

"Jed, Lionel and Lois will call upon you this afternoon."

"Will you lead me to them now?"

"With pleasure."

"But how came White Panther here, and was he not going to call on me, too?"

"We have not seen him since we entered the city last night. He says he is going to the great council, by which Jed says he means the court, and give some kind of testimony against the Squire, though none of us can guess of what nature it will be."

They had now reached the hotel where her friends were staying. All were delighted to meet Theresa once more. Lionel for the first time beheld her bereft of the Indian stain, and she seemed more beautiful than ever.

Lois had many things to say to Theresa in regard to her approaching union with James Carlton, and in Theresa she found a loving and sympathizing friend. They all had much to say, and when at length Theresa arose to go, it was late in the afternoon. Jed accompanied her home, and then went in the direction of the hotel where Leonora was a prisoner. He had a letter written by Arthur, which he wished, if possible, to deliver to her.

He waited around, keeping his broad-brimmed hat drawn

down over his eyes, completely concealing his face. At last he saw old Martha bearing a tray of food up stairs; he followed her, and noted which room she entered. After a time she came out with the tray and dishes, and after she had descended the stairs, he placed his mouth to the keyhole and whispered—

“Miss Leny!”

“Who called me?”

“Me—Jed.”

“Oh, Jed, I am so glad you are here!”

“No time ter talk with yer, Miss Leny; that nigger’ll be back here. I’ll shove a letter under the door. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Jed.”

She picked up the letter, and after covering it with kisses, she thrust it in the bosom of her dress, nor dared to read the precious missive until the old negress who occupied a room leading out of hers was that night fast asleep. It was a tender, loving missive, full of cheering words. It told the lonely girl that she was not alone; that her friends were near and watching carefully over their darling, to see that no harm came to her.

The next day but one was the day she had promised to go to the altar with Squire Morton, and she had felt all day sadly depressed and low-spirited, but that letter cheered and nerved her as no stimulant could have done, and she now felt that she would do or dare anything to bring to justice the wretch who had so long kept her from her loved ones. The letter also contained a few words from her father and brother, and her sister Lois, who told her of her own great happiness, and that when they forbade the Squire to marry, Arthur was to take his place, and at the same moment she and James would join them, thus there would be a double wedding.

Not long after Theresa left the hotel office, where she made her inquiries regarding the Squire, that worthy was about to go out again when the clerk called to him, and told him a lady had been inquiring about him.

“A lady? What did she look like?”

“Couldn’t tell. She had a veil on; but ’twas no one you know, for she asked if you wasn’t Mr. Somebody other, and when I told her no, she said she had made a mistake and went out.”

The Squire said he was sorry for that, he would be pleased to

Now the lady, and after a few more laughing remarks he also left the hotel.

CHAPTER XV.

The Squire sent to Leonora dresses, laces and jewels of every description, but these she did not take the trouble to remove from their wrapping papers. She would wear the one dress she had worn since she left her home, and his friends might think what they pleased, she told the Squire.

“When I am your wife I will endeavor to obey your slightest wish, but until that time arrives you must allow me to do as I please”

The morning dawned clear and beautiful, after the storm, and the church was already crowded when the bride and bridegroom entered, the Squire smiling serenely as he met the glances of his friends, and Leonora pale but composed. They stood side by side, and when the question was asked, if any one knew why this man might not lawfully wed this woman, a firm voice said, “I do,” and a woman rose to her feet, but her face was closely veiled.

“And who may you be?” asked the Squire, angrily.

She drew aside her veil and said:

“Your wife, Theresa Morton.”

“Theresa!” gasped the Squire, and at sight of her face he turned ashen white and would have fallen had not the much surprised minister caught him.

Two officers then came forward to arrest him, but before any one was aware of his intention he leaped through the open window and disappeared.

The city was searched, but nowhere could he be found.

Arthur now came forward and clasped the half fainting Leonora in his arms.

After the people had somewhat regained their composure the minister was told to go on with the ceremony, and Arthur Colby and Leonora Houghton were pronounced man and wife, after which James Carlton and Lois Houghton were united by the man of God, and it was a very happy party that left the church, and none happier than the old Judge.

A grand feast awaited them, and after the merry dinner and the crowd had dispersed, Arthur said—

“Leonora, for five years you have known me, and have al-

ways supposed me to be poor and homeless; but now that you are my wife, and I know your love is sincere, I may tell you that I am rich and have money enough for us to live in any style you desire."

Great was the surprise of all when Arthur announced himself a rich man, and both he and Leonora were congratulated on their good fortune.

Suddenly White Panther appeared before them in citizen's dress, and going up to Jed he pushed back the hat that shaded his face.

"Thunderation!" gasped Jed. I be busted if yer heven't gone an' painted yer face as white as a woman's. Panthe', what's the matter with yer? Go an' wash it off, an' don't get so durned sappy agin."

"Dis be no paint."

"What ther devil is it, then?"

"White Panther no Injun."

"Then yer ain't White Panther enny more?"

"No; me be Ralph Raymond."

Brief was the story Ralph had to tell. When a child, a mere baby, his father and mother had been murdered by his mother's brother, who was, Squire Morton. He left Florida with the child to go North, and having crime enough on his guilty soul he did not wish to murder me, so hired a villain to kill me. The wretch, however, shrank from killing a helpless child, and gave me to a band of Indians, and confessed to the old woman to whose care he confided me who I was. On her death-bed she told me who I was, and I have patiently waited this opportunity to bring the guilty man to justice and claim my own."

James, Lois, Arthur and Leonora decided to take up their abode in the city. A beautiful double house was purchased, and after much coaxing they persuaded the Judge and Lionel to remain with them. So the old man sold the block house. He found a ready purchaser in Jed. Hortense was sent for and came gladly at the call of her dear children.

Ralph Raymond remained in the city, and was fast becoming a polished gentleman.

One day news came to James and Arthur that the detective had arrested Squire Morton in New York city.

They at once went in search of Ralph, to whom they communicated the news. He was rejoiced, and said he was only sorry they had not killed him.

There was great excitement in the city when it was known that so great a scoundrel as Squire Morton was to be tried for his many crimes, and those who had once flattered and courted him were foremost in denouncing him.

How eagerly they looked forward to his trial, and how gloomy and silent was he in his prison awaiting he knew not what sentence—he who had so long lorded it over those who were poor. They would all attend his trial, and rejoice when his sentence should be pronounced.

At last the day of trial came; the court-room was thronged.

The Squire's snaky eyes gleamed brighter than ever as they rested upon the faces of those who in days past had been glad to call him friend. How he longed for the trial to end, that he might show them how little he cared for the opinion of them all.

He gazed around until he saw Theresa, his eye fired with a gleam of hate; unflinchingly she gave her testimony. Then a woman closely veiled took the stand, and throwing back her veil disclosed the face of Adah Raymond, and close by her side her son Ralph.

The Squire gave a long, despairing groan. Suddenly there was the report of a pistol, and Squire Morton fell from his chair dead.

Adah Raymond and her son Ralph went to live in the forest mansion, after having it changed and repaired, much to the satisfaction of Jed, who would now have his beloved "Panther," as he still persisted in calling him, near by him, and they would again hunt and fish together to their hearts' content.

Ralph still loved the forest, which had been for years the only home he had known, and though much improved and refined, he was in many respects White Panther still.

Jed declared that "Panther was growin' proud, and turnin' white had completely blunfuddecated him."

Jed prospered finely at the block-house, and the negroes were all delighted with "Massa Jed." But Jed became dissatisfied, and complained to Ralph that the place was "goin' to ruin without a woman ter boss ther niggers and make 'em work."

Ralph would laugh knowingly, and one day ventured to suggest that Jed should find a wife and bring home. Jed blushed to the roots of his hair, but never after complained to Ralph.

It was Christmas after the events related in our last chapter.

and among our friends in St. Louis great preparations were being made for enjoying the season.

One item of interest was the marriage of Lionel and Theresa.

Just at sundown Leonora stood by the window musing. Suddenly she turned and said:

"There is one face that we shall miss sadly, and I wish to my soul he would come to visit us."

"Who?" cried all together.

"Dear old Jed."

Aunt Hortense dropped a pie she was just going to put into the oven, declaring "it was hot."

"How could it be hot?" asked Leonora.

"Don't know, but 'twas," said she, snappishly.

The evening came, and Aunt Hortense appeared in a new black silk with a lace collar around her neck, and as she sat there in the midst of her friends she looked every inch a lady, and Arthur declared he had never seen her look younger.

"Tush," said she; "I am an old woman now and am not so pleased with flattery as I once was."

"No," said the Judge, "when Hortense was young she was awfully giddy and—"

"There, I think you had better stop. If it had not been so ordered that I had always to see to my older brother, I might have had some chance to be giddy."

Suddenly the door opened, and in walked Jed. He was warmly greeted by all, and Arthur inquired why he did not bring Ralph with him.

"Well, I tried to coax him to come," said Jed, "but he don't like this blarsted town no more than I do. I wouldn't a-come, only I knew that a par were goin' to be 'hitched,' and I wanted to see the fun."

It was over over at last, and the Judge had just taken Theresa in his arms and called her his daughter, when a voice said:

"Hold on here mister preacher man. I reckon yer hain't got through yet!"

And the astonished minister saw standing before him Jed and Aunt Hortense.

"Do you mean my friend that you wish to be united to the lady in wedlock?" asked the minister.

"Yes, siree; that's about it," replied Jed.

Great was the surprise of all but to Jed and Hortense at this summary union.

Supper was announced, and if the dinner had been a success the supper was more so. Jed was in very high spirits, and kept the company in a roar of laughter until the party separated at a late hour.

When Jed and his wife left for their forest home Aunt Hortense felt keenly the parting with the Judge and his children, yet she is very happy, and comes often to the city to visit her old friends.

Five years travel in Europe transformed Ralph Raymond into a polished gentleman, and when he returned he brought with him a young wife—a beautiful Spanish girl. He sold the old mansion in the forest, and with his wife and mother moved to St. Louis.

Jed still remained at the block-house with aunt Hortense, happy and contented. And when Ralph removed to the city, Jed declared that 'twas "blasted funny how't eddication would turn a sensible young man inter a durned fool in less'n no time."

Pete Hayden, the negro at the block-house of whose bravery we have previously spoken, took unto himself a wife. He married Hetty, and remained at the block-house, as before.

Thus all who figured conspicuously in our story were made happy and contented after the trials and dangers through which they were called to pass.

[THE END.]

THE SECRET CAVE.

CHAPTER I.

Julian Lancaster was the younger son of an aristocratic family.

Having, through his mother, an independent fortune, he had until the age of three and twenty put off doing anything but travel and learning languages.

He had a vague idea that some of these days he would do something, as through the influence of his elders he could always command a position in the diplomatic service.

As he was no idler, content to live on the proceeds of his mother's fifty thousand dollars, he had for some time been busy pondering in his mind what might be the wisest course to pursue.

He was in New York with a friend about his own age.

He had done all the usual rounds, and so a virtuous fit was on him.

"Shelby," he said to his young friend, as they yawned over the late breakfast at the fashionable hotel, "I am getting tired of all this; besides, my father seriously wishes me to be doing something."

"Julian Lancaster," responded the young gentleman, with a slight lisp, which is better imagined than imitated on paper, "how can you speak in that ridiculous way?"

"I am not independent, with a fortune in perspective," answered Lancaster. "I must either put myself in harness or marry."

"How very horrible!" exclaimed Harry Shelby, with an expression of comic terror. "Well, I suppose one has to do it some day, but at our age the very thought of such self-sacrifice is horrible!"

"I do not think so," retorted Julian, with a look of great wisdom; "there is a great deal to be said on the matrimonial side, but I won't say it!"

"Don't, there's a good fellow."

"I will not until I meet the right person," said Julian; "but to-day is Tuesday—I think of starting on Saturday."

"Ciel! on Saturday?" lisped Harry Shelby. "Ah, no—Monday; besides Friday we go to the ball of Mrs. Ames's, and shall be too tired to travel next day."

"I am tired of breakfasts, balls, parties—everything," said Julian, with a sigh.

His friend looked keenly at him, not at all satisfied with the words.

"Where have you been these last few days, while I have been playing propriety with the Ransom girls?" questioned the young man.

"Doing the rounds of the studios. I spent three hours with Cheever, yesterday," answered Julian, with a very audible sigh.

This sigh caused his friend to think very much, but as he knew his companion was wonderfully touchy on certain points, he was silent, but determined to wait and watch.

He knew that Julian had a very susceptible heart and greatly feared he had become attached to some beauty of inferior rank and position, of whom he was either ashamed, or at all events ashamed to speak.

As it was, he called around to bid farewell to his old friends, the Ransoms, and left his gloomy friend to his reflections.

Whatever these may have been, he quietly kept to himself.

And so the days passed until that of the anticipated ball, which was to be one of the most brilliant and select affairs that had taken place in the city for some time.

Julian Lancaster was perfectly indifferent about the matter, but his friend, Harvey Shelby, was determined to keep him to the mark.

He had promised that his handsome *compagnon de voyage* should on that evening become acquainted with his distant relatives.

Julian was too good-hearted and too good-natured not to accede to the young man's demands, and accordingly at eleven

o'clock on the eventful night he was ready to accompany him to the ball.

Soft music, beautiful flowers, pictures, marbles, which only Italy can produce, were there; also lovely and superb women, such as only New York can show, and over all was cast a voluptuous languor which is caused by the climate, and dancing began as soon as the rooms were full enough to justify so doing.

Julian Lancaster was well known to the Misses Ransom by name, and they were much pleased to be personally introduced by their cousin.

They were lady-like girls, without affectation of any kind, and were both equally handsome—Maud and Lilian.

They were delicately fair, with coal black locks, which, in deference to the unmeaning exigencies of society, were fastened up in some style as abhorrent to nature as to beauty.

They had received a good education, and were pleasant and conversable.

Julian Lancaster having once taken charge of Miss Ransom, acted as in duty bound.

But there was to any one who had been a keen observer, a listlessness in his manner, varied at times by deep thoughtfulness which indicated that although his body was present his mind was far away.

After two dances with the young lady, Julian Lancaster handed her over to her mother, and strolled off.

At some distance he espied his friend Cheever, the artist, one of the most popular young men in New York—a dark complexioned young man, with a dreadful expression, as some thought, while others declared him an uncommonly fine fellow.

He was alone, and was looking around with rather a blase, indifferent manner, when his eyes suddenly lighted up with pleasure as they fell on Lancaster.

"So you have not left New York?" he said.

"No; contrary to all my resolutions I have delayed again. Shelby could not give up this affair, so I stayed," answered Lancaster.

"Ain't you greatly bored?" questioned Cheever.

"Decidedly so," responded Lancaster.

"Well, then, suppose we adjourn. We can be back in time to show ourselves," continued Cheever, with something exceedingly like a yawn. "This is too slow for me."

"Where would you go?" inquired Lancaster.

"To the Madame Del Monte's parlors," proposed the artist.

Now this house was said to be a very sinful place. It truth it was a private house, owned by a lady where *roulette* was played, and which was winked at by the authorities, because it was supported by a class not easily to be offended.

Lancaster had never been there.

Some presentiment which he could neither explain nor control decided him at that moment to go, although he had always avoided such localities.

They proceeded down stairs, obtained their cloaks, and were driven to the residence of the Madame Del Monte.

It was in a dark and out of the way street, and reached from under an archway.

CHAPTER II.

The rooms of the elderly Madame were several in number and were devoted to dancing, conversation and play.

As very many celebrated and agreeable people were to be met with, it was frequented by people who never touched a card or engaged in games of chance.

Cheever and Lancaster, as they strolled through the rooms, saluted several acquaintances, and finally reached the apartment devoted to business.

Julian Lancaster had never been a gambler, but was always ready to take a hand at whist.

The sight before him was a novel one.

Round the table—eager, fierce, careless, anxious, according to their different characters—sat men and women, awaiting the decision of fate or chance.

It was not a pleasant sight, as a whole, and Julian was turning away when his heart seemed to stand still, he grew pale as death, then flushed, and stood open-mouthed—transfixed.

The cause of this sudden change was a young girl, apparently a mere child, who was watching the game with an interest and anxiety that was entrancing.

Lancaster had never seen so perfect a face, never looked on eyes that so resembled what the poet calls wave-washed onyxes. Then, as she threw down some more money to replace that which she had lost, she did so with such a merry, musical laugh as Julian Lancaster believed he had never heard in this world.

He turned and caught Cheever's arm.

"The original of the portrait," he said, in a voice husky with emotion.

"Yes; what do you think of her?" said Cheever, with affected indifference.

He did not reply for a moment. His passionate eyes were again fixed on her with an expression of intense longing.

What was the secret of form or expression which gave such electric power to the glance of that slight and fragile being?

When at last he could control his emotion sufficiently to speak he said, with a sigh:

"She is very beautiful; but what should a young girl like her be doing at the roulette table?"

"Madam Di Lachasse seems haunted by a demon of unrest," answered the artist. "She is believed to be immensely rich. She is travelling under the guardianship of a rather ill-looking Spaniard, a chaperone, and a retinue of servants. She goes everywhere. I understand she was to have been at the ball to-night."

"You are acquainted with her?" asked Lancaster.

"I have painted her portrait, and am on intimate terms with herself and friends."

"Will you introduce me?" eagerly asked the young man.

"With pleasure," responded Cheever, with a smile at his friend's excitement. "Come this way."

They approached the gaming table. The young lady turned and bowed her head with a sweet smile.

"One moment," she said, with a sweetness of voice which wonderfully enhanced her charms. "Let me know my fate."

She had doubled her stake on the well-known martingale system, and had lost.

She rose carelessly and advanced toward the artist with a look of comic despair.

"You are going?" said Cheever.

"Well, yes. I really cannot tell why I came unless to relieve my ennui. I promised the General to meet him at the ball, but persuaded my faithful Lucrezia to bring me here."

"My friend here," spoke the artist, "Mr. Julian Lancaster, requests an introduction."

She raised her eyes to the young man's face, and after two or three more words frankly gave him her hand.

Julian was as it were magnetized. There was something in her glance which seemed to overcome his whole being and set every pulse beating with painful vigor, while the touch of her hand appeared to thrill to his heart of hearts.

"Mr. Cheever will bring you to my morning receptions," she said, with a seductive smile, "and we shall become better acquainted. I must now away to the ball."